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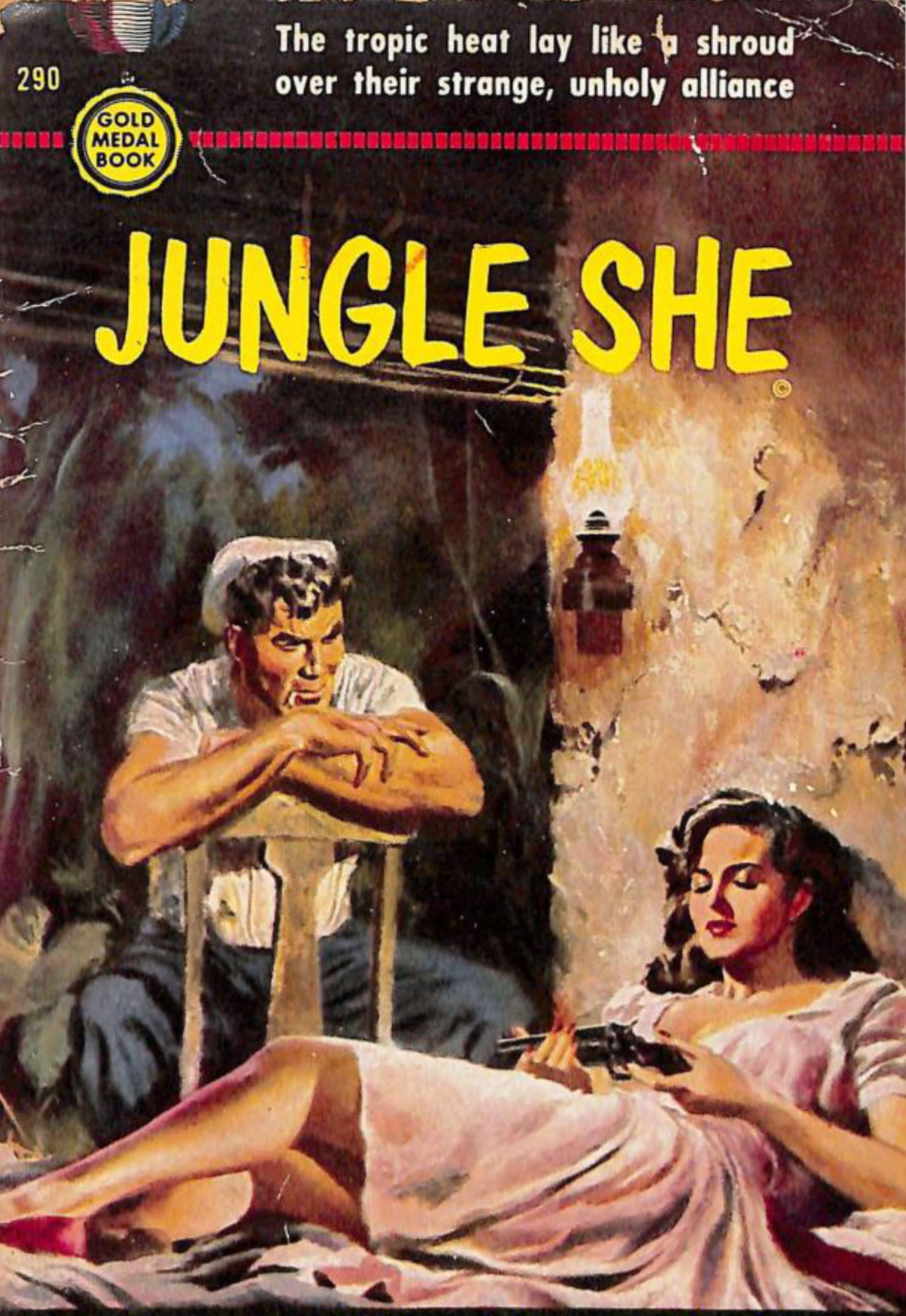
GOLD MEDAL BOOK

The tropic heat lay like a shroud over their strange, unholy alliance

JUNGLE SHE



Another jungle thriller of love and death by **DAN CUSHMAN**, author of Gold Medal's **JEWEL OF THE JAVA SEA** and **NAKED EBONY**

Original Gold Medal Novel—Not a Reprint

JUNGLE SHE

"You must go back to your husband."

Dougherty's words hit her like a slap. Anger brought a sharp feline intensity to her lovely face. She twisted her lithe body in a frantic effort to get free. She was stronger than he imagined and she almost got away, but he pushed her against the wall where his weight was too much for her.

"Girl, girl! Listen to reason. All I ask is a month. A visit to Singapore, and you with him in Tengah. Believe me. He will do anything for you. Anything. I will find you there."

"Get out!"

"My dear, listen to reason—"

"Get out!" She bent suddenly and sank her teeth in his forearm. Pain and surprise made him let go and retreat, and the next instant she was around the table, against the wall, and there was the gun in her hand. She cocked it and for a startled second of terror he thought she would pull the trigger.

"Get out!" She screamed it this time. "I hate you! Rotters, all of you. There isn't a real man amongst you all."

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JUNGLE SHE

A Gold Medal Original

by

Dan Cushman

GOLD MEDAL BOOKS
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JUNGLE SHE

Chapter One

His name was Dougherty. In the Islands, from Manila all the way to Torres Strait, he was known as Frisco Dougherty after San Francisco, the city of his dreams.

Dougherty's size made him easy to remember. It also made reasonable his claim of holding down one of the tackle berths on a Stanford team that almost made the Rose Bowl. He was a couple of inches over six feet, thick and broad, with a regal manner of carrying his head, and strength unimpaired by the fever, dysentery, and poor liquor. He was thirty or at most thirty-five years old.

Dougherty arrived in Tengah, North Borneo, on a junk. The craft had spent the morning hours picking her way through the mudbars of the Nam Poo and now,

at last, had come to rest with her ridiculous, high side against the wharf of the Ah Hong Company, and Dougherty, freshly shaved and garbed in wrinkled, somewhat soiled whites, his best, was preparing to go ashore.

"Tengah now, v'y glad," said the Tonkinese skipper, bowing and smiling. "You come back topside maybe tomorrow?"

"Aye, perhaps, who knows?" Dougherty spoke with a grand manner and his size allowed him to carry it off without appearing ridiculous. "I have before me a task of some uncertainty, but we shall see."

"Day late, v'y sowwy."

"Aye, a day, in a junk, an eternity. The endless days. Your philosophers had something to say of that."

He had brought his billybag topside, but now he decided against taking it. Instead he opened it, got a .45 caliber Colt automatic from its oiled wrappings, tested the sliding mechanism to make sure that fungus had not fouled it, and slipped it in the holster pocket inside his white cotton coat. Then, pulling the coat so the pistol's weight was correctly on his shoulder, he went ashore.

He walked slowly. It was hot. Later it would rain, and with twilight would come a breath from the lagoon, but now it was hot, lifeless hot, Borneo hot. He walked from the quay to a cobbled street. Among tapong trees he could see the masonry and white frame and thatch buildings of the town. Some coolies carrying basket loads of sago on shoulder poles climbed a cleated ramp to a warehouse. There was no other activity.

With a closer view of the town he saw that the stone buildings which had given the town its appearance of solidarity were actually rotted out shells, roofs sagging, only their lower front quarters in use, and those chiefly by Arab traders selling slum.

He found the hotel, its upper floor in ruins, its lower floor chiefly a pub. He went in, pausing to let his eyes adjust to the dimness. It was cool and filled with the sour fragrance of beer.

A voice with an Aussie-Cockney twang said, "Well, gov'nor, how for a pint to start sweating on?"

The man slowly became visible through the flicker of sun blindness. He was red-faced, his bare arms were a mass of purple tattooing, his big stomach was cut by a

rope that held up his pants. There was no one else in the place. Dougherty looked around carefully to make sure, unconsciously moving the weight of the automatic as he did so.

"Aye," he said. "A beer would be welcome."

The beer was cold, and it was Australian, a rare combination on those coasts. He drank half the bottle without lowering it. He blew his breath, stripped off his topee, which left the imprint of its suspension band sweat-printed around his head, and watched the man toss his money in the cash drawer.

"Ice cold, b'Gawd," the man said, "and you the first all day to sample it. These Chinks and 'af-castes, beach-combers, ten-acre planters, w'at do they know of proper beer?" Turning back he gave Dougherty a quick, narrow scrutiny. "You ship in on that junk?"

"Aye."

"Well, every man to his tastes, I say, and it's none of my affair what you're doing here, but you don't look like the type that'd ship in on a junk."

Dougherty, somewhat flattered, moved to get a glimpse of himself in the mirror behind the bar, but it was so deeply etched by fungus it gave back only his shadow. He straightened his coat, thinking that his clothes, while soiled, were indeed of good quality.

"You're American, w'at?" the barkeeper asked. "Oh, I can tell. I can tell 'em a mile. You Americans are all alike, and like the Chinks, too, when it comes to money. Never let a thing like inconvenience stop you from turning your dollar profit. You in rubber?"

Dougherty made a sign that could have meant either yes or no and said, "I am here on a matter of some importance. I came to see a plantation owner—Van Hoog."

The barkeeper came up straight and gave him a stare. "Van Hoog," he said. "Well, I'm damned!"

"His plantation is nearby, is it not? Can I find a rick to pull me out?"

"Now that black Eddie is a first-class rick boy, but I wouldn't say you had the money to hire him close to Van Hoog's." He leaned over confidentially. "Year ago another boy tried to pull a fare up to Van Hoog's and one of them trigger-happy guards cut loose with a Bren and broke both his legs. Bled to death lying there. Can

you fancy that? Of course, I wouldn't want you to let the big Dutchman know I told you."

"This Van Hoog—he receives no visitors?"

"Well, he don't put on any lawn parties, I'll tell you that."

"Why would he set up machine guns at the gate to his compound? You've had no guerilla trouble here."

"Now *there's* a question I've heard asked before. You don't know 'im, do you?"

"As a matter of fact I don't."

"Well, I don't know what your business is, and I'm not the snooping kind." He waited for Dougherty to tell him, and when Dougherty said nothing he went on. "But if I didn't know Van, and if I wanted to meet him, I wouldn't go near that compound. I'd sit tight, right 'ere, and wait."

"Here?" Dougherty said, motioning to the room.

"Right 'ere, in this pub. He likes to come around, have a look, see who's new in port. And maybe catch a word about *her,*" he added with exaggerated significance.

"Her?"

"His young missus." He acted surprised that Dougherty was not already informed. "She run off with a young plantation guest and he's been like a mad gorilla ever since."

"Indeed!"

"Well, don't talk about her, that's my tip. Threatened to kill me once for that very thing. 'How's the missus,' I says, just to be friendly. 'Have you had any word from her?' and he was after me with them hands. Damn such a place as this. I'm going to get out as soon as I find a buyer. I don't like a spot where one man can get hold of things and set himself up as Gawd A'mighty."

"His wife," said Dougherty, musing with the thought. "His young wife. Too young, perhaps. Too beautiful."

"She was a looker all right."

"He loved her very much?"

"Well, I wouldn't know about that. If you want my opinion, it hurt his pride more'n anything. Like I said, he's Gawd A'mighty here, and when she picked somebody else—"

"Aye. How much do you suppose—" then he stopped.

The barkeeper was watching him very closely now. "Say, if you have word of that young spitfire—"

"Of course not. Only curiosity." Dougherty bought a second beer. His eyes roved the room and came to rest on an upright piano. He walked to it, sat down, and played. He played Chopin with an empty, banging brilliance, the out of tune piano making a dead dissonance in the heat and fly drone of the East Indian afternoon. Finally he stopped and took a siesta. He was awakened by a storm, a solid deluge, a blue-white impact of lightning. He watched the storm pass and move inland, leaving the gutters in torrents and steam rising from the washed cobblestones.

The barkeeper, hopefully rattling beer bottles in the ice tub, said, "Oh to be in Sydney now, w'at?"

"San Francisco!" said Dougherty. "I have been in all of them—Sydney, Hong Kong, Manila—but San Francisco is the queen of the Pacific. A city on hills, but not the human anthills of Hong Kong. Clean and sharp and fresh. And the air! Damp, yes, but not this wet blanket of humidity, not this pressing heat with its stenches and its sticky flies, these low coasts, this cesspool country."

"Sydney—" the barkeeper started to say, but Dougherty was talking for his own ears and went on.

"And I'll see it again! Aye, this year, somehow, I'll see it again. This year I'll walk those hill streets and feel that cold San Francisco fog in my face!"

Dougherty went outside, still musing of San Francisco. This year, indeed, he was going back. Not a bum, not flat on his financial *derrière*, a TTT on some tramp steamer with more rats than cargo, but a *gentleman*. A gentleman with jingle, and that jingle with the aid of Van Hoog.

He walked to a Japanese bathhouse, bathed, and sat naked with a woman fanning him while her husband laundered and ironed his whites.

He would have to go easy with Van Hoog, for the Dutchman was no fool. What fool could make himself a millionaire while others went bankrupt on these malarial coasts?

"Shave, haircut?" asked the Japanese, returning with his shirt on a hanger.

"A trim, lightly. Tengah, your town, it is not what it once was."

"Very much gone to hell since war," said the Japanese, working his clippers.

"No regular freight steamers?"

"All silt. Maybe sometime British government dredge harbor all over again."

"But what of the heavy cargo from the big plantations?" he asked, knowing there was only one big plantation, Van Hoog's.

"No heavy cargo, only sampan cargo, junk cargo."

Dougherty was informed of that, yet here was Van Hoog, a planter who had made a million, and no heavy cargo. It was very strange. There was a secret involved that could not be gleaned by questioning a Japanese bathkeeper. It was a secret that had led others there before him, and some of them, he had heard, had never returned. Well, *Dougherty* would return. As he moved he could feel the hard lump of the .45 caliber automatic under the mat beneath him. He would return, to San Francisco, with a chunk of Van Hoog's money in his pocket.

"Ace in the hole," he mused. He sang a bit of the tune, "Ace in the Hole," popular when he was a kid; it seemed so long ago, so many oceans ago, Stateside. Yes, Dougherty was smarter than those others who came to learn the secret, for he had an ace to play, and his ace was this: he knew the whereabouts of Van Hoog's young wife, and dead he could never lead Van Hoog to her.

Returning to the street with his whites sharply creased, he found the shadows of evening slanting over the town. There were customers in the pub, and a good-looking young Chinese in wide trousers and a T shirt was playing the piano.

He looked around. None of the men answered the description of Van Hoog. These seemed to be down-at-the-heel Britishers, independent operators who had leased portions of the old, bankrupt plantations, and were bucking the jungle trying to bring a few rubber trees into production.

He found an out of the way table. Ten thousand would be sufficient, he was thinking. There was a time, when he first came East as geologist for the Consolidated Exploration Company, that he dreamed of a stake in the millions, but that was kid stuff. The East had taught him a lesson. Ten thousand would take him back, it would set him up with a room on Powell with a view of the cold, gray bay in the distance, and the clang and bang of cable cars from the pavement below. San

Francisco, a walk in the cold with fog moving in through the Gate, and dinner, *American* food, something not embalmed in curry, drenched in durian oil.

The Chinese kid was playing "Madame Ubangi," a piece recently popular in the Hong Kong night clubs, chanting the obscene words in falsetto, afterward looking hopefully for money, but only a copper came his way. Dougherty sent him a gin pahit and the boy was delighted. He came over, bowing to say,

"You like? You like maybe hear my own personal composition? Hokay! I call this 'All Same Chew-Chow Pretty Much Sweet Yum Sugar Cane Baby.' "

Returning to the piano he played and sang at top speed, the music a mélange of all the jazz pieces ever written, its words a stunning torrent of pidgin English, and Dougherty realized that in a purely reverse manner the lad had come up with something that was terrific.

"My specialty, sing Chinese coolie talk, all Statewise song hits," he said. "Over in Charley's Astana night club in Singapore everybody laugh like hell. You think maybe composition pretty swell?"

Dougherty liked his enthusiasm. His youth appealed to him. He was extremely handsome, as the Chinese of Kwangtung and the Islands so often are, his skin a perfect, dusky olive, his eyes wide-set and very soft. "Your composition is a masterpiece! I can see you billed over the marquee at the Chinese Sky Room, in San Francisco. What is your name?"

"Chun Lin, but all Yankee fella call me Kid Chun!"

"Good, good! Kid Chun, in neon!"

"So? Good. You talent scout maybe like movies? You from big-time L.A.?"

"Los Angeles, that neon-lighted cesspool? Don't mention the name to me, lad. A sprawling, amorphous town. A carnival town, half Barnum & Bailey and half Sioux City on Saturday night. No, lad, San Francisco, the Cathay of the New World, the gleaming cameo of the Pacific."

The boy's eyes gleamed, visualizing San Francisco. "You take me hokay? Visa, everything?"

Dougherty said, "Aye." no longer listening. He stood up, watching a huge, thick, apparently neckless man who was coming down the street. Van Hoog! he said to himself. Aye, that would be Van Hoog!

"You wish I play more of my personal compositions?" the boy asked eagerly.

"Aye." said Dougherty, not listening.

The men at the tables were watching Van Hoog, too. "Right on the minute," one of them said. "Look at him! And that deaf-and-dumb one backing him up!"

The deaf-and-dumb one was evidently the native who followed at his heels with a bolt-action rifle under one arm and a rolled-up umbrella under the other.

"Ain't he in a fine state? Mad as usual. Madder. He could eat raw meat and beat you to death with the bone tonight."

They all laughed, but they were silent, devoting themselves to their drinks when Van Hoog came through the door.

Van Hoog gave a hand sign to the native, the deaf-mute, leaving him just outside. He walked in, looking around, nodding to a couple of the men without speaking. He took notice of Dougherty and the Chinese boy. In a slightly hunched forward, slightly bowlegged manner, he walked to the bar, where a bottle and glass had been set out for him.

"Well, how's tricks?" asked the barkeeper with careful deference, and received a grunt for an answer.

Van Hoog poured a drink and downed it. He poured another and downed that. The liquor passed his throat like rain water. He poured a third and let it stand. He was not fat, as from a distance he had seemed to be. His shirt was unbuttoned to his belt, revealing a chest and abdomen slabbed with thick muscle. His skin was perfectly hairless and rather pink. He was medium complexioned, his hair was dry blond from the tropics, his eyes were a very bright blue. His face, while broad, was not toadlike in the manner of so many big men of his race. Were it not for a morose expression he would have been fairly good-looking. He had a good jaw and nose, and he had breadth across the cheekbones that took the roundness from his face. He was about forty.

The Chinese boy had commenced to play the piano, and Van Hoog turned to stare at him. To a melody much like "Ding Dong Daddy from Dumas," he commenced to chant:

"Love nest longsidy tinhouse, baby!
You like singy-song big moon, maybe?

Wow! give-em wow-lom!
Wow! shaky tiggy!
Johnny-boy comy house,"

The words "Johnny-boy comy house" seemed to strike Van Hoog a blow. His face colored. He started forward. He covered the distance to the piano in three long strides, he seized the boy, tearing the T shirt half off from him, and dragged him, wild-eyed and kicking, off the stool. He shook him like a Great Dane might shake a puppy, then with a twist of wrist and forearm, he hurled him away with force that sent him skidding on knees, hands, and face halfway to the door. There the boy, crawling backward, stared at him with terrified eyes.

"*W'at segt U?*" In rage, the big man's tongue seemed to be too thick for his mouth. "Eh? *W'at?* You think maybe to laugh at me in your ku-ken-jango? You don't laugh at me."

The Chinese, shaking his head and saying, "No, no!" got up and fled through the door.

Van Hoog was sweating. Sweat had come out all over his face and among the roots of his short-roached hair and it ran in a trickle between the slab sides of his chest. He turned and looked around the room at the others. "Get out!" he roared. "You hear me, get out! Out, out! Damn you, no man laughs at me."

They got up, one after another, with poor spirit but without saying a word, and in a minute the room was cleared save for Van Hoog, the barkeeper, and Dougherty. Van Hoog started back to the bar before he realized that Dougherty was still there, making no move to go.

"You heard me?"

"Aye, I heard you, and I shall get out at the moment that pleases me. Now, if you can control your temper, I want a word with you."

For the moment Van Hoog was startled to silence. Then fury took possession of his face. It had the primitive quality of one who had long lived where there was not the slightest necessity for controlling his feelings. He walked to Dougherty's table. He seized the table with both hands with the evident intention of hurling it out of his way, but Dougherty's right shoulder had moved the slightest hitch, and there, resting on the table edge and aimed between his eyes, was the black, deadly muzzle of a .45 Colt automatic.

Van Hoog did not breathe. He licked his lips with a quick stab of his tongue. "If you think—"

"I think you have quite forgotten how to treat a gentleman when one chances in your path."

Van Hoog remained with his palms spread wide on the table, leaning forward, his face so close that Dougherty could see the little, purple veinlets in the corners of his eyes.

"And what makes you think I *ever* knew how to treat a gentleman?"

"Please sit down."

"You are commanding *me?* Here, in Tengah, someone commands *me?*"

"Aye, you are a powerful man here. Perhaps you have even commenced confusing yourself with God." He lifted the gun and tapped it gently on the edge of the table. "But observe this mechanism. Thirty-nine impersonal ounces of steel. What are you to it? In the most brutal of language, you are nothing but a two hundred and fifty pound slab of meat. I beg you, sir, be seated."

Van Hoog hooked a chair with his toe, pulled it over, and sat down. His weight made the chair creak off center beneath him. He decided to laugh. He laughed and blew his schnapps breath and said, "Goot, goot! They all crawled out, those swine, petty men, but *you* did not. You have guts, eh?"

"I have a gun. And a dream."

"Did you know that Bodoh, my boy at the door, would blow the top of your head off at one signal of my finger?"

"Why, that would be too bad for both of us." Dougherty put the gun away. He took time to regard Van Hoog. "Man, man," he said, "what has become of you?"

Van Hoog was surprised. "You mean we have met before?"

"No. I was thinking of you as a man, as a brother. We are all pretty much alike under the skin. I am something of a philosopher, sir, and tonight as I sat here watching you, I thought, here is a man once a boy, a boy who loved to walk through the leaves and hear their dry rustle underfoot, who liked to lie on his back and see the white clouds scud through the sky. And so I repeat; man, man what has become of you?"

"What craziness are you talking?" Van Hoog asked,

and he tried to laugh, but the remark seemed to unnerve him. "What do you mean, getting me here to talk such rot? What are you, a clergyman?"

"I told you I am a philosopher."

"Who are you? What are you doing here, what do you want?"

"Dougherty." He thrust his hand across the table and Van Hoog, after considering, exchanged handclasps. "Dougherty, San Francisco. Twelve years along these rotten coasts, but still Dougherty, San Francisco. My home, sir. My dream, my religion. Next year I am going back."

"Twelve years, and now you are going back! After twelve years they never go back. What is it, you are broke, as the Yankees say, on the beach? Money, is that what you want of me?"

"I came," said Dougherty, pausing with a good sense of the dramatic, "to speak with you in regard to your wife."

Anger suddenly reappeared on Van Hoog's face and he started to his feet.

"Wait! Hold your anger. Do you think any mere curiosity, any business of a petty nature would lead a man of my refinement to this rotting port, this cancer of the jungle? No, Mynheer!"

Van Hoog breathed and blew his breath out. There was sweat on his face again. He noticed the barkeeper listening and waved for him to leave the room. When he was alone with Dougherty he said, bent across the table, "You talk about mine wife. You hear perhaps that I would pay a great deal of money to get her back? True, true! Also true I would kill any man who tried to take mine money and did not *produce*. Now, Mynheer Yankee, do you perhaps know where she is?"

"The thing presents some difficulties." Dougherty did not wish to name an exact price. Not yet. Not while there was a chance of gaining the freedom of Van Hoog's plantation, and perhaps the possession of his secret, the secret of how a man could become a millionaire in bankrupt Tengah without shipping more than junk and sampan cargoes for the last five seasons, a secret that might be worth fifty times the price of the woman. He said, "I would rather discuss the matter elsewhere, in private."

It delighted him when Van Hoog said, "*Ja*, you are correct. Who knows here who is hiding beneath the floor, listening? They hate me, these swine. We will go to my house. You could do with a good supper, *ja?*" A grin found its way across his vast face. "Then you can at your comfort plan how to clip Van Hoog, but goot!"

Chapter Two

Van Hooc stood and held the schnapps up to mark the line of its contents before calling for the barkeeper to take it away.

"It costs me four-pounds-six in the liter," he said on his way to the door, "and he would steal half of it if I did not watch him. And the stories he spreads about me! What did he tell you about me while you were waiting, eh?"

"He warned me that no rick boy would pull me to your compound for fear of his life."

"You see, a man is a little bit successful and they name him killer, thief."

The deaf-mute waited outside, his dark form blending with the shadows of vines near the door, only the blue shine of his rifle and the whiteness of some silver bracelets informing on him. Van Hoog signed and the deaf-mute followed them up the street, past the white man's town, into the sprawling native quarter.

"You saw her?" It was an effort for Van Hoog to ask the question with jealousy tearing his guts out.

"Aye."

"She is well?"

"She seemed so."

"And *him? He* was mit her?"

Savoring the opportunity to torture the big, domineering man who walked beside him, Dougherty said, "I would assume he was the one. He was very handsome. I saw some boots that could have been his beside her bed."

Van Hoog walked for half a minute without speaking. Then he said, "Him, Fawley! Clinton Fawley. Such a name, does it not sound like him, cad, weakling, never ten pounds to his purse? My guest, the hospitality of mine house, and how did he thank me, how did they both thank me? Him, *Fawley,* she chose instead of me! But she will come back. She will be glad some day to have me back."

The moon was out but under the trees it was very

dark. The native quarter was left behind, and now they followed a path through banana orchards, into the open, across odd-shaped rice paddies by means of successive sidewalks on piles.

"No carriage, I walk," said Van Hoog. "A man must keep in shape in the tropics. Look at me, stronger than the day I came and still have I taken not one grain of quinine."

"Aye, there's one white man in a hundred who thrives on miasma. When do we reach your land, sir?"

"Now, here. This rice—mine. The old owner shipped rice from Bangkok. In one year, 1927, he paid out *£703 8/6* for rice, and then they blame God, the Japanese and the Communists for bankruptcy."

"You have done well here."

"They told you that? You looked me up in the big book?"

"When one sees your name emblazoned on the wharf signs at Hong Kong beside the name of Jardines!"

He chuckled and said, "Good, good," obviously pleased that his name was so widely known.

"Let me see, the old owner was Penland," Dougherty said.

"He is dead, buried there, in a beautiful little pagoda garden. All the time I keep one boy working there, paying him wages to keep the shrubs clipped just so. You see, I am not so much without sentiment. What was it you said? Could I still see the white clouds sail past?" They left the paddies behind and found a whitewashed path, all very neat, every stone in perfect succession. Van Hoog went on, "How many men would you find to tend a grave like that? I will show it to you tomorrow. Iron castings for the fence I shipped all the way from Manila. Second-hand, $296.15 before shipping and the bronze paint $28 more. I wish those people who have spread all the talk about me would come for themselves and see how I have cared for his grave."

The talk, of course, was that he had murdered Penland, had taken over his plantation, had married his daughter, the girl who had left him, who had eloped with the house guest.

The path was joined by a lorry road, and both were cut by an iron gate between masonry pillars. The gate had been a conventional one of the English style in-

sufficient in itself to serve as a bar to anyone intent on entering, but it had since been laced with barbed wire and there was a heavy wooden beam to back it up. Extending from the pillars in both directions was a stockade of hardwood posts, each as thick as a man's thigh, eight or ten feet in height, pointed at the top, and set in earth. Here again barbed wire was strung in alternate loose and taut strands along the top. All the brush had been cleared away, leaving an area of sixty or seventy yards perfectly smooth and free of any cover, so only in a particularly heavy darkness could one approach the stockade without being seen.

Van Hoog clapped his hands, there was responding movement inside a hut beyond one of the pillars, but no one showed himself there, and soon a brown fellow in shorts and a uniform blouse came running along outside of the wall with a sub-machine gun cradled in his arms.

"Tuan?" He saw it was Van Hoog and that everything was satisfactory and called through the gate, "Hokay, ope-em up!" Only then did the man come from his hut to unfasten the gate.

Van Hoog said, "The times, unsettled. I'm not alone in this. Observe Malaya, those rubber planters, sitting with their families to eat, behind barbed wire, with a Bren for a centerpiece, eh?"

Aye, thought Dougherty, the days of the white man in the East are all but finished.

The compound circled an area of considerable extent, perhaps two square kilos, for there was room for some fruit and vegetable gardens, a lawn and large plantation house, some guest houses, the servants' huts, warehouses, and machine sheds. Here and there on posts were lighted electric lights, attracting veering clouds of insects, and inside one of the machine sheds he could see a point of violet brilliance followed by showering yellow sparks as someone worked with an acetylene torch.

Van Hoog said, "I own three lorries. One of them is a Mack, the biggest in North Borneo. I could save money by hiring coolies with baskets."

"Then why—?"

"I have learned things in the Islands. For instance, for my overseers I must have Moslems. To a Moslem you are a great man if you own lorries. One of them came

second-hand from the U.S. Army surplus, a shipload from Suez. It was green, the Moslem sacred color. I told them it had been to Mecca. Now Moslems from the whole coast come to see the lorry that has made its pilgrimage to Mecca. They shoot dice just for the privilege of driving it. You see, you were wrong that Van Hoog was not a man with sentiment."

Dougherty was on the point of saying that he had not come seeking a man with sentiment but a man with money.

Although most of the buildings were freshly painted and in good repair they were old; only one seemed to be new, a masonry or concrete block structure with tiny, deep-cleft windows and a floodlight mounted at each corner. Its resemblance to a jail was not lessened by the pair of armed guards who prowled back and forth with rifles in their hands.

Van Hoog, perceiving his interest, said, "You are interested in mine storehouse? Machinery, ammunition, you must watch it like hawks. The natives, salt-water boys, they are all thieves, of course, but small thieves, sneak thieves. But the bush boys, those kinky-haired blacks with spikes through their noses, they would come in force, raiding for guns. I tell you there are bad times coming in Borneo if the government does not get itself some guts and kill them."

The plantation house was very wandering and large, a central, two-story portion in the English country style with wings added later, built in the Island fashion with verandas and elevated loggias jutting to catch the breeze.

Van Hoog kept talking, "The house, it was in terrible ruin. I have worked on it for years. All the undersupports were gone. I replaced the pilings with concrete." The front door was locked and he jerked on a bell pull which made a jingle deep in the house. The door was screened, and over the screen was lacing of heavy-gauge steel wire of a type the zoo collectors use for the cage shipment of animals.

A houseboy with an electric torch had a look at them through the door before unbolting it. They entered, with Bodoh following huge and silent like a great jungle cat. A second houseboy took their topees. The door was bolted behind them. It gave Dougherty an

unpleasant, gutless feeling to be locked in, and he breathed deeply, thankful for the weight of the Colt in its undercoat holster. He followed Van Hoog through an empty anteroom, through a living room in which amber light of uncertain origin gleamed on the dull-rubbed lacquer of Hindu furniture, to a smaller sitting room, more modestly furnished in the Grand Rapids style where a table was set for one. The door closed and Dougherty, looking around, saw Bodoh still there with his rifle.

"My poor deaf-and-dumb servant, he makes you nervous?" asked Van Hoog, and with a hand sign sent him from the room. "Food before business." He waited for Dougherty to seat himself at the table and took his place across from him. Smiling, with his eyes tiny slits, he said, "You will not wish to rob Van Hoog after a good dinner."

After dinner, with a cheroot lighted, Van Hoog suddenly came to the point, "For your information concerning my wife, how much do you want?"

"I did not wish to rob you, sir. Believe me, I dislike taking a shilling." He could see that instead of winning the man's confidence it was making him suspicious. At least he had won entrance to the compound! "But, very well, twenty thousand British pounds."

"Goot, goot!" he said laughing. "I like chokes." But he did *not* like it. The accent proved that. Dougherty had noticed that his thick Dutch came through only when something angered or excited him.

Dougherty said, "I did not come here to joke."

"You are like the poor stick who played Hamlet. He was serious but they laughed all the time." Van Hoog's laughter had gone sour on the corners of his mouth.

Dougherty reared back in his chair and said, "You take me for a dunce, sir? Do you think I came here without informing myself of the amount you have spent already in searching for her? Detective agencies in Singapore and Hong Kong, the Subuta organization in Java—"

"You think the price of rice is determined by the hunger of the buyer? What a primitive standard you live under, like traders in the jungle! This is the twentieth century and price is determined by the market. So I say you have asked above the woman market by some thousands of pounds."

"One bag of rice, sir, looks very much like another, but this woman, aye, *this* woman—"

"You will leave it for me to admire mine wife. Wait! Hold your tongue a second. What proof do I have? Perhaps you are cheating me. Perhaps you have not seen her at all. I will gamble, however. I will pay you $250 now and a second $250 when she is again mit me."

"A pittance. Ridiculous."

Van Hoog tapped his finger against a little jade bell and the serving boy appeared instantly. "Tell Amdah to bring $250 American."

Dougherty got to his feet, straightening his coat, pulling his wrinkled whites down. "Sir, you err. You are not dealing with one of your petty plantationers now."

"Two hundred fifty or nothing."

"If you please, my topee."

Van Hoog laughed, leaning forward, forearms planted among dishes of half-eaten food, his weight shaking the table. A small, white-clad Hindu in very large, horn-rimmed glasses had meantime opened the door and was holding a Manila envelope.

"No, no," said Van Hoog, motioning him back. "The amount is too small. Put it back." The Hindu bowed and withdrew and Van Hoog with an ugly relish said, "*Ja*, we haff decided to bargain otherwise." He got to his feet. "Where is she?"

"I told you—"

He shouted, "You haff told me too much! I don't like men who talk too much. Here *I* talk. Me, Van Hoog, you understand?"

Dougherty got around his chair. There, with his arm out of sight he reached for the Colt, and at the same instant he realized the deaf-mute was behind him. He drew and turned and tried to dodge the blow he knew was coming, but it struck; the room turned over with him in darkness and there was a ringing like chaos in his ears.

He somehow clung to one shred of awareness. Men talked above him, voices out of a void. He knew when he was rolled over, lifted, dragged, and dumped down again. The gun, he kept thinking, and tried to grope for it but he could not move his hands. With sudden terror he turned over and tried to get his hands free. Then he

knew he was on an ottoman, arms held to his side by a set of link manacles.

Above him, Van Hoog shouted, "Vare iss she?"

"To hell with you!" said Dougherty.

"You saw her, vare?"

"You swine. You dirty swine—"

"*Ja?*" cried Van Hoog, and drove the heel of his palm to Dougherty's jaw. It landed flush, snapping his head to one side and almost driving him off the ottoman. Dougherty tried to get his shoulders up to protect his jaw. The interference only enraged the big man and he swung with all his might. Dougherty reeled to his feet trying to turn away, the floor slanted with him, he went down. He was on knees and elbows with his head on the floor. Van Hoog kicked him alongside the head with a force that drove him back to a kneeling position, and kicked him again to send him sprawling on his back against the wall.

"Vare?" he shouted. "Vare did you see her?"

"In Bandjermasin!" It was the first place that occurred to Dougherty's befuddled mind.

"Ha, so! How did she get there?"

"What?"

Van Hoog seized him by his short-cut hair and dragged him. He lifted him halfway to his feet and drove a knee to his belly, sending him once again toward the ottoman. He struck it, falling, its edge in the small of his back.

"How did she get there?"

"By—sailing dhow."

"Who carried her? Tell me his name?"

"I don't know."

"Where in Bandjermasin?"

"The Zomertuin!" The Zomertuin was a hotel in Balikpapin. He said anything to keep the man from striking him again, anything to win time.

"In Bandjermasin?"

"Yes! Damn you, yes!"

"She is there now?"

"She was leaving that very night. She is no fool. She knows the search you are making. It was an accident that I learned."

"Why did she reveal her identity to you at all?"

Dougherty fought to collect his thoughts, and Van Hoog shouted the question again. "America!" Dougherty

shouted back. "She wanted a visa for America. She needed an Australian birth certificate."

"She told you where she would go?"

"No!"

"Otherwise where would you deliver the certificate, eh?"

"Not me. I don't know. But I could learn."

"Vat do you mean?"

"Through Wu in Bandjermasin. *Wu of the W. H. Kung Company!*" And as Van Hoog looked at him with truculent disbelief he shouted, "Yes, Wu of the Wuch'ang! Wuch'ang, Wuch'ang, you've heard of Wuch'ang!"

He was still fighting for time, and his mention of Wuch'ang had turned the trick. Wuch'ang was an underground Chinese organization, purveyors of stolen goods, the dominating influence in the currency and commodity black markets of the Far East, and today the only organization left which was able to operate on both sides of the Communist Chinese iron curtain. Even in Tengah, where Van Hoog ruled as king, mention of Wuch'ang gave him pause.

Van Hoog, his face dripping sweat, his breath making a quick sound in his constricted nostrils, stepped back.

"What are you trying to say? Are you saying that *Wuch'ang* sent you here?"

"Otherwise do you think I'd have trusted myself with you, at your mercy, inside this compound?" He got an elbow on the ottoman and lifted himself to sit on the edge. The effort brought pain like a knife to cleave his brain. He was blind and dizzy and had to wait for it to pass. Blood tasted salty in his mouth. His nose was bleeding, the front of his shirt was soaked and gummy from blood. He could not lift his hands to do anything about it. "Behold your guest! *Me*, your guest!"

"So that is it. You are mit Wuch'ang deep in the rackets!"

Dougherty sat quite still, bent forward, watching the blood that formed on the end of his nose drip to the floor. He was becoming increasingly light-headed. He first thought it the loss of blood, but it wasn't—it was the approach of fever. Excitement and the beating had brought it on.

Van Hoog said, "What would you have me believe,

that she is a captive of Wuch'ang, that they have added extortion to their crimes?" And Van Hoog said a great deal more, his voice coming in meaningless waves of sound. His persistent questioning became unbearable, like the screech of metal setting Dougherty's nerves on edge.

"What's the trouble with you?" Van Hoog said, shaking his shoulder.

"Get me some quinine. It's the fever. It's splitting my skull, can't you see? That beating you gave me—" He got to his feet, screaming, "You son of a bitch, if I die you'll *never* see her again!"

Chapter Three

He lay with fever, suffering thirst and endless nightmares. He knew when it was daylight, and night again. He was in a bed surrounded by mosquito netting that distorted the things of the room, giving them animation, terrifying him until his teeth chattered. At last he fell into a deep sleep, and awoke with the fever gone.

He lay very quietly. He was alone in a large bedroom. Light came in slats through some closed shutters. He said, "Hello!" and got no answer. He sat up, slowly, testing his strength. He was all right, it was only his usual bout with malaria, this time brought on a trifle ahead of schedule by excitement and the beating he had taken.

He parted the mosquito curtain and stood up.

He was naked. His head throbbed a little and his scalp had a stiff, puckered feeling. He felt and found that his head was nearly covered by adhesive and gauze. He remembered then—he had been cut when Bodoh, the deaf-mute, slugged him. A pitcher of water, some quinine tablets, and a bowl of soup stood on a little table beside his bed. The soup was cold, with yellow grease in chunks on the surface showing how long it had been there. He drank from the pitcher and poured the rest of the water over his neck, letting it run over his naked body and soak into the grass mattings that covered the floor. He felt better. He tried his strength, lifting himself on the backs of two chairs, swinging his body back and forth with feet off the floor. It left him sweaty and trembling, but that would pass. He was well past the fever. He was strong enough to travel.

He looked outside. It was dawn or evening. Evening, he decided, and the sun just gone. Twilight now, and in a few minutes it would be dark.

Someone had hung his clothes neatly in a closet, money still in his pocket. No shoes, however. And no gun. Of course, no gun.

He tried the door, very gently, knowing it would be locked. He stood by the door, ear under the steeply tilted ventilating slats, and listened. Someone moved, and paused for a long time, and moved again, this time with a slight click-click which he knew to come from a gun swivel. A guard. He looked at the windows. All solidly barred, thick ironwood timbers mortised into the casings.

He was tempted to get dressed. Instead he drank the last drops of water and went back to bed. He wanted to rest a little more, and he knew it was best if they thought the fever still had him.

It became dark. Much later, after dozing, he heard a voice and the sound of the door opening. Misty through mosquito curtain, silhouetted against the light of an electric bulb in the hall, was a slight, white-garbed serving boy with a tray.

"Tuan!" the boy said pleasantly.

Dougherty remained quite still, breathing as fevered men breathe, watching through narrowed lids. A guard was standing back of the boy, craning his neck to see. The guard was tall and negroid, member of one of the bush tribes, or a black fellow from the Solomons. He wore brown shorts and a uniform blouse and he carried a rifle. The guard remained in the door on watch while the serving boy walked toward the bed, saying, "Tuan, food, you like?"

"Later, later!" Dougherty whispered at the end of a very long breath. "Put it down."

"How you feel?"

"I think I will die."

"No, tuan," he said very gently, reassuring him. "I think pretty soon old devil fever he break. You let me feel pulse."

"Go away!"

Without saying more the boy obeyed him and withdrew. The door closed, the bolt thumped into place.

Dougherty then got up and, feeling through darkness, located his clothes and dressed. All but his shoes. Damn them, they had kept his shoes. And his gun. He needed a weapon, a club, anything. Then the bed came to mind, and, lifting the springs, he found an ironwood slat. It was broad for his hand, but tough and heavy. With the slat, he stood by the door.

His ears, grown acute to the silence, heard the slightest

stir of movement outside, the guardsman's slow walk, his long pauses, even the little floor sounds as he changed weight from one foot to another. Distantly an engine ran for a time and stopped. That was the light plant going on and off. A lorry came around the road, briefly caught the window in its headlamps, and was gone. There was music from a homemade guitar, and far, far away to gong-dissonance, the chanting of Buddhist priests.

At last the boy returned.

He opened the door and stood holding a pitcher. "Tuan!" he said, addressing the bed. "Water, tuan?"

Dougherty stood straight, not breathing, gripping the ironwood slat. The boy was so close he could smell the pomade with which he had slicked down his hair. He could have reached half the length of his arm and touched him.

After three or four seconds, the boy walked in, almost brushing him, still looking at the bed. "Tuan, you take quinine tabs, tuan?"

The guardsman had come up the hall until he was opposite the door and able to see the bed, but he did not come close. Not like the other time.

Dougherty cursed silently through clenched teeth. The boy was at the netting. In a matter of seconds he would *know*. The time was *now!*

Forcing himself to move slowly, almost casually, he stepped away from the wall, through the door. In the dimness the guard momentarily mistook his whites for the whites of the boy, then he recoiled, trying to get back and bring his rifle around, but Dougherty, moving sharply, brought the slat up and around in an abrupt arc. It hit the guardsman just below the left ear and dropped him on his back. He landed with arms wide, his head making a solid thud on the mat-padded floor.

Dougherty bent, snatched up the rifle—a Mauser. He looked for a pistol, found none, spun and met the serving boy's belly with the rifle muzzle when he dashed from the room. It stopped him stiff, holding his breath, eyes popping from his head.

"Softly, softly!" said Dougherty. He smiled and poked the gun several times against the rigid muscles of his abdomen. "Aye, that's it, lad. Easy, *no-bunyi*. Easy and live."

"Sure, tuan!" he whispered and took a long, trembling breath.

Dougherty had to resist the temptation to run. He forced himself to listen. There were no footsteps coming. The big house lay quiet. The guardsman was on his back, arms the same, eyes partly open, sightlessly open. He was so still it occurred to Dougherty that he was dead. He did not bend to see. He merely stood and watched. A slight trickle of blood was coming from his left nostril, drip-dripping to the floor mat where it stood in a tiny pool, glistening black. The guard was breathing but he showed no sign of a quick revival.

Dougherty did not care one way or the other. Escape was the only thing in his mind. He said to the boy. "Get me out, lad. Down the stairs, I'll kill you otherwise. It would grieve me to kill you, boy."

"Yes, tuan. Come, tuan!"

The boy led him down some stairs to a hallway, dusty, narrow, long unused, then to a door at the servants' end of the house. It was bolted, with the bolt driven so hard Dougherty had to knock it free with the steel-shod butt of the Mauser.

The boy had drawn back a trifle, and, seeing his chance, he dived headlong, rolled over, reached his feet, and ran in a series of dodging leaps. Dougherty made no pursuit. He waited, listening after the sound of the boy's footsteps had disappeared. He waited for what seemed to be a long time, though perhaps no longer than twenty seconds. No alarm in the vast house, not a sound. He opened the door and stepped outside. The porch floor was rough under his bare feet. Dark, but out in the compound the moon was just cresting the tops of the casurina trees. He walked. He forced himself to just walk.

Lights burned at the corners of the concrete building, the one that looked like a prison, the one that perhaps *was* a prison. A guard was on the prowl, rifle slung to his back. The guard plodded out of sight and returned without looking up, and Dougherty passed from his view. He was on a path of white gravel among raffia palms. The path was hell on the tender bottoms of his feet. Now, midway between the gate and the machine sheds he made his decision.

He cut over to the nearest shed. In its depths an

electric bulb was burning. A lorry stood with its motor pulled on a chain hoist. Somewhere out of sight came tap-tap hammer sounds. On a long, grease-encrusted bench, tools were scattered. He hunted and found a set of long-handled snips.

He went out the door with them. The hammering had stopped. He had the feeling that he was being watched, eyes at his back. He walked on into the night. No alarm. No sound at all. He struck out for a remote section of the compound wall, through orchilla weed to his waist, trying not to think of snakes.

There were lights along the wall, but on the outside, and Dougherty stood in shadow. Here and there a brace-timber big through as his waist was placed against the wall at a 45° angle. He climbed one, having a hard time carrying both snips and rifle in one hand. He dropped the rifle, butt first, to the ground outside and, clinging with one leg over the top, cut the alternate taut and loose strands of barbed wire. Six of them.

He tossed the snips away and lowered himself outside.

A bell suddenly struck the night, clang, clang!—an alarm followed by the shouting voices of men. His nerves, long taut for the alarm, snapped and he lost control of himself. He ran across the open area that separated the stockade from a papaya orchard.

"Halt! Me-temback!" screamed a man somewhere back of him. He took two more steps and dived headlong as a machine gun cut loose with multiple flashes, its bullets tearing the earth and the earth showering him.

He lay flat, his arms outspread, face on the ground, even collapsing his lungs to diminish the target. Bullets passed with a roaring wind-whip above: when they stopped, he sprang to his feet and ran. He dived and crawled as the machine gun started again to hunt him blindly to the end of its ammunition clip.

He was among the papayas at last. He kept going. The ground was uneven from cultivation. He fell repeatedly and got up to stagger on. Thorns cut his bare feet. He reached a path and followed it. There were native huts with their thatched, gabled roofs white in the moonlight, native voices babbling with excitement over the shooting. The footpath led him into jungle. It was a black tunnel through which he had to grope his way. The sound of pursuit became distant, and at

last was gone altogether. He rested, weak and sweat-drenched. After a quarter hour he was able to go on. Sometime before midnight the path ran down to a cane-bundle bridge that crossed a lagoon. He could smell the sea. There were huts on high stilts and dugout canoes gunwale to gunwale, bumping in the little waves. He hired two boys to paddle him, reaching the bay and doubling back along the muddy jungle shores until he was among the flotsam of prahus, junks, and sampans that lay in a solid mass along Tengah's native anchorage.

The Ah Hong Company junk might still be at the wharf, but he dared not chance it. Instead he chose a trading prahu with twin sails and a shelter amidships.

"Passage!" he said, pulling his big body over the side. "Pelayaran. Pergi-me-you Batang, very solid cash dough, all same fifty buck."

The skipper, a Buginese, wiry and old, left his sleeping pads in the shelter and crouched in its entrance in just a lava cloth, the moon shining on his protruding eyeballs as he looked at the rifle Dougherty had in his hands. Then his face broke into a grin at mention of the fifty dollars. He shook his head, saying, "Singapore buck, no. Hong Kong buck, no. Yankee buck, sure me damn quick."

"Yankee buck, lad. Cash on the barrel head." He sat down. "Ai, Allah! I'm bushed. I need a drink."

"Arrack?"

"Arrack, anything."

The Buginese was inside the shelter for a time and crept out carrying a wooden mug filled with arrack wine, sweetish and still beaded from fermentation, but it was like cognac in Dougherty's necessity, bucking him up, putting a bottom in his stomach.

"Aye, to Batang, Lutong, Miri—anywhere. There are plantations there." He sat in the bottom of the boat with a sensation like paralysis flowing through his muscles and drank the last drops in the mug. "Anywhere from this quagmire port, its bush-league Hitler." From his pocket he drew some bank notes, mixed Straits, Hong Kong, Dutch, and U.S., and peeled off the fifty all in tens. Waving it, he cried, "Go, go! Cast off."

"No catch tide?"

"Row! For fifty American you can row."—

The bay seemed very broad, but there were wide salt

flats along shore, and dikes of volcanic rock broke like rows of teeth through a white froth of waves in the other direction, so the waters suitable for navigation, even for a prahu, were limited. After an hour of steady rowing they moved between Mua Besar and Kentang Head, where the channel was a bare two cables in width, and there, in the early dawn a launch was waiting, anchored broadside. A Bren machine gun was mounted amidships; a black fellow crouched behind it, his knees level with his ears, hands ready to feed a half-circle clip of cartridges through.

The Buginese had stopped rowing, but the tide was in movement, carrying them. Dougherty had a look at his Mauser; it was loaded with expanding bullets, and he could very easily tear the entrails out of the gunner, but there would be others below out of sight.

"Ace in the hole," he said and laughed. Van Hoog was another you could depend on to have that ace down in the hole!

The Buginese stared at him, terrified at being borne ever closer to the machine gun.

Staying out of sight, Van Hoog shouted, "Yankee! Do you hear? No trouble, we can saw you in half!"

Dougherty stood, his arms out, one foot on the gunwale as the tide carried them in. A naked boy appeared at the bow of the launch, ready to throw a coil of line.

"O.K.?" called the boy.

"Aye!"

Dougherty caught the line and pulled hand over hand, swinging the prahu around so the boy could lash the gunwales together with a second line. Then Van Hoog came up the steps from the cabin.

Huge, smiling, and satisfied, he said, "You see, everyone here obeys me. At the fishing village, even as you dickered for a canoe, they were on their way to tell me."

"You're magnificent!" said Dougherty.

"No sarcasm! We have exchanged blows, you almost killed my rifle boy, let's call it quits."

Dougherty laughed with a jerk of his shoulders and looked at the Bren machine gun.

"The gun?" said Van Hoog. "Think not again of it. It is only for your protection. So you will not be tempted to foolishness." He reached and gave Dougherty a boost.

"It would grieve me to have to kill you now. I tell you the truth, at first I thought you only a windbag. After your escape tonight, the devilish boldness of it, why then I changed my mind. We are cut from the same cloth, Dougherty. Only one difference. I have been a success and you a failure, why? Have you ever stopped to ask yourself why?"

"I need a drink."

"You need some shoes, too. I will see what can be found in the locker. But drink, shoes, everything after business." He had drawn out a leather folder and, opening it, took out a very thick pad of currency. It was American and most of it in twenty-dollar bills. "See? I aim the machine gun to make you a profit. Oh, of course not the twenty thousand British you talked. The age-old bargain of the East, eh? Do you ever pay what the Armenian asks for his rug? No, not unless you are a foolish tourist, and then he has no respect for you. So we must compromise at the price or we would have no respect for each other."

Dougherty scarcely breathed, looking at the thick packet of money. "How much?"

"Here, only two thousand dollars—American." Then Van Hoog, with a flourish, drew out a stiff oblong of paper, an order for money bearing the mark of the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation. "But this for three thousand more. I have postdated it, and of course it would be possible for me to stop payment if your end of the bargain were not carried out. What do you say?"

Dougherty took the currency and the check. He could not hide the slight tremble of his hands even though he knew Van Hoog was watching, smiling a little.

"I say *yes*." He thrust it all in his pants pocket and slapped it against his leg and pulled his pants high around his lean waist. "I say *yes*. I will account it a privilege to do my part in mending your broken home. A sacred thing, sir, sacred to all true Americans—the home!"

Chapter Four

DOUGHERTY HAD PAID off the Buginese and bidden him good-by. There was no use now withholding from Van Hoog his young wife's whereabouts, and he divulged it, the port of Photang, below the Equator, on Borneo's west coast.

He had never intended that, he had never really intended to inform on her and break her trust, but there was no other way, and tomorrow, aye, tomorrow would be a new day. For *now* he would play the game as he must play it.

Through the hot morning he sat in a canvas chair in thin shade beside the cabin as the launch plugged steadily along the green-purple coast toward Batang Baram. Beside him sat Van Hoog, sleeping. Bodoh, the deaf-mute, was crouched aft cracking hard betel between his molars, chewing with copius red-brown saliva, occasionally turning to spit at the sea but never, not for the fifth part of a second, taking his eyes off Dougherty. A man in a white robe and tarbouche with a hawklike Arabic face leaned with one elbow in the spokes of the wheel, keeping the boat on course as it rose and sank and caught an occasional wisp of spray from the swell. Below he could hear the machine gunner and the engine man playing cards for penny cash.

The morning seemed interminable. Each time Dougherty came awake from a doze he felt the deaf-mute watching him. The monsoon was blowing, occasionally carrying the odor of exhaust, raw and sickening. He had not completely recovered from his bout with fever; nightmare fragments of apprehension came each time he nodded in sleep. Sometimes he would remember the girl, and for just a second he would be back in the room with her, the warm tropic night, the smell of ylang-ylang, the vision of her youth, of her smooth brown skin. Then he would accuse himself and be confronted with the reality of her legal husband, this Van Hoog, a gross man snoring through early siesta.

"Water!" he called, and the machine gunner quit his

card game to bring up the thermos. A passage from Boswell's Johnson came to his mind and hung there, and after drinking he said it over, liking the cadence of the words upon his lips, " 'Nay, smile with the simple, what folly is that? And who would feed with the poor that can help it? No, no; let me smile with the wise and feed with the rich.' "

Van Hoog was awake with his eyes closed, as Dougherty could see by the twist of smile on his face. "You quote?" said Van Hoog.

"Johnson. Samuel Johnson. Boswell's Johnson. A book, a particular favorite of mine—"

"I have read it, in Dutch." Van Hoog caught his surprised glance and laughed, shaking the hands crossed over his broad abdomen. "You are surprised. Like you said in Tengah, what has become of me? You think I have no fine feelings, that I am just a brute?"

"I—"

"In the bar you were talking to me about something, about where was the boy who liked the sound of dry leaves under his feet. So long ago, in Holland. Tell me, how did you know?"

Dougherty smiled and waited for him to go on.

"*Ja*, me, Van Hoog, a boy who loved peace and beauty, lying on his back, on the green hill, the clouds sailing past. In Maastricht, the blue sky of Holland. Me, Van Hoog, the same man who struck you down, the man who might have killed like that!" He snapped his fingers. "So. The same man. What has happened to me, you asked. Why am I thus. But I ask you, are you as you were in San Francisco? This town you said? Why? Because a man must live. In the jungle one must grow claws, in the jungle a man must kill or be killed, a man must kill first or die." Van Hoog turned and pressed one thick finger against Dougherty's arm. "I will tell you something. My name, it is not Van Hoog. It is not *Van* anything. You already guessed that?"

Dougherty *should* have guessed it, for "Hoog" signified the exalted and the mighty. It was too pat.

"In Holland, my father, Jan Haringpakker. Yes, my real name, like it sounds, a packer of fish. When I was a boy, moving from place to place, my father a poor government servant, the boys would ask me, a stranger, 'What is your name?' And when I answered Haringpakker

always how they laughed! Oh-ho! What a great joke, here was a boy named Haringpakker. You see me, big for my age, clumsy, with my name, Haringpakker!"

"And so you chose Van Hoog."

"*Ja.* Van Hoog, high and mighty. Such a name to pick, you think I am a fool?"

"In your own private manner, yes. I believe you may be a fool."

"Well, listen some more. About me, a boy, fourteen years old. My father, he ran away with some woman. My mother worked, all day as a clerk and at night in a butter factory, anything, saving her money for me, her only child. She sent me to school, to Nieww School in Amsterdam. Mind you, only the best. I must go there among the whelps from the great families. Me, in my country clothes, Haringpakker. Not one friend, always alone. And like barking dogs they would follow me, making sport. 'Haringpakker, Haringpakker!' they would shout at me. They made a sing-song of it: *'Haringpakker, Haringpakker, hoe maakt uwe visch het?'* "

He thrust out his hands and closed them, and with fury possessing him, his voice became thick and his accent a guttural Dutch. "I could kill them mit mine hands. Like—so!" Then he recovered somewhat and laughed, "*Ja.* I left. I took a business course. Shorthand, accounting, banking exchange, statistics. I swore someday I would come back, powerful in the one way open to me—money. I would kick them out of the way, I would buy them out and dump them in the street. Their ancient names, their mortgaged houses, sneering at *me,* Haringpakker, but collecting poor florins as admission to their drawing rooms so the tourists could see the second-rate paintings left behind after the rich Americans carted away all the Rubens, the Frans Hals, the Rembrandts. Ja, *I will go back.* Me, Haringpakker!"

He was sweating. He shook out a handkerchief and patted it all over his face and squeezed it into a damp ball and put it back in his pocket. He said, "No man before have I told this."

"Why me?" Dougherty asked.

"I don't know. Because we both have read Boswell's Johnson. Because you guessed the boy I was, walking alone, under my feet the dry leaves of autumn, with my head in dreams. In the green fields, *ja,* among the tall

poplars, where no one would shout at me 'Haring-pakker.'"

"Aye," said Dougherty. He looked off across the water at the shore, heat-shimmering and uncertain, and thought of San Francisco with the lower hills lost in grayness as the fog moved in. Are we then so different? he thought. What has the world made of me, selling her back to him like a slave on the Arab market?

They ran all day and all the night. They put in briefly at Pontianak and went on, southward. Nearing the port of Photang twenty-four hours later, Van Hoog ordered the launch out of sight in one of the jungle-bowered lagoons, to wait for dark.

"You are certain they will still be here?" he asked Dougherty.

"Of course not. I long ago stopped being certain of anything. If they *are* here, what do you intend?"

"Will I kill him do you mean?" He laughed. "You have not changed your mind about me! You also think I would take her back like a wild animal in a cage. No, no! Let me tell you what I dream about for her—on my arm, so young, so beautiful, in ermine, silks, diamonds, at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. Do I sound like a brute now?"

Dougherty said, "I shall expect, sir, to receive that final three thousand of my money immediately when my end of the bargain has been fulfilled. You will then date the check as of the present."

"As you wish."

They left at twilight, and following a larger lagoon, between black walls of jungle, came out on the river that formed the harbor of Photang, eight kilometers from the Java Sea.

A ship was anchored just off the channel, and passing close to it, Dougherty saw it was the Sally Scott—Jaske's ship. He had known Jaske for many years. They were friends of a sort. It gave him a bad feeling to realize that Jaske was still there, for Jaske had first brought her identity to his notice, and it had been Jaske's idea that sent Dougherty on his journey to Tengah, a journey which had so ended in failure.

"What is it?" Van Hoog asked, watching with his clever little eyes. "You know the ship, this rusty old tramp?"

Dougherty shook his head. The launch moved on,

slowly, with darkness settling and the scattered lights of the city ringing in the harbor. Van Hoog ordered the boat stopped, spoke quietly to the native boy, who swam off toward the wharfs. They waited. It was very quiet. An abomination of Chinese music came from a sing-song boat roofed with striped canvas, alight with paper lanterns, making Dougherty remember Canton, the Canton of other days.

After half an hour the boy returned out of the dark, pulled his streaming body over the gunwale, and said, "O.K.!" with a shine of his very white teeth in a smile. Van Hoog ordered the boat started again.

"You seem much at home in Photang," said Dougherty with uneasiness showing in his voice.

Van Hoog was flattered. "I am at home all along Borneo. She should have known that. Photang, of all places! She knew I had an agent here."

They showed no light. They moved, keeping bare steerageway, following a zig-zag course among sampans, prahus, and house rafts. They entered an open stretch of water between two covered wharfs; there the engine was cut altogether but the boat's momentum carried it on, into shadow, and then into the utter blackness of a roofed dock. Her side scraped against pilings and she came to a stop, rocking gently, the splash of little waves sounding unnaturally loud beneath the roof. A man spoke in Chinese, some dialect that Dougherty did not understand, Van Hoog answered in Dutch. He said "Come," to Dougherty. They walked through a door, and an electric light came on, revealing a long, almost empty warehouse.

The Chinese had turned on the light. He was middle-aged, thin, and well dressed. He greeted Van Hoog after the manner of an old friend, but when he started to talk Van Hoog stopped him.

"Later," he said and turned toward Dougherty with a certain hardening of manner. "Well, we are here, in Photang."

Dougherty conquered his cornered feeling and said, "You want me to take you to her, just *like that?*"

"Of course."

"Don't be a fool, man. We must move carefully. You wouldn't want your little bird to fly all over again."

"Don't worry. They have no money, where would *he*

get money? She is not used to poverty. Believe me, after three months of that nothing, that *Fawley,* she will be *glad* to return with me." But he wasn't certain. He wasn't certain at all, and it bucked up Dougherty's confidence.

"You must trust me to proceed alone, in my own way."

Van Hoog trusted nobody, only Van Hoog, his sharp blue eyes showed that, but he assented. "*Ja.* Go, do it your way. But *do* it, I warn you, do it. You will meet me here, when?"

"Tomorrow, at this instant."

"Goot. Go then."

"If you please, sir, my gun." And when Van Hoog looked at him blankly, "Don't you remember, you took my Colt from me at the plantation."

"I haven't it here, of course." But he sent for a gun from the ammunition locker, a .30 Luger, oil-coated and in good working order, and it fitted after a fashion in Dougherty's holster pocket, making him feel like a better man, putting the old confidence in his walk as he strode outside under the fine, deep sky, the flawless starry sky of the tropics.

Chapter Five

He assumed that Van Hoog would have him followed. That would be Bodoh's job—Bodoh the deaf-mute. He walked without looking back up the narrow, flag-stoned street beneath the banners of Chinese shops to the Hoofdstraat, where he asked for Captain Jaske. Jaske had not been seen there for a couple of days.

He was undecided. He sat over a gin and soda watching the street, the steady night flow of people under the electric lights, Chinese, Malayan, and an occasional white man. No sign of Bodoh. Of course, there wouldn't be.

He had another gin and soda and tried to think. He did not know what to do. He wondered if, after all, she might be talked into going back to her husband. That would be the perfect solution—he would have his reward, cash in hand, and with her as a friend inside Van Hoog's plantation he would still have the chance to determine the man's marvelous source of wealth. He decided to find her and talk to her. No, best find Jaske and talk to *him*. After all, getting at Van Hoog's secret had probably hatched in Jaske's jackal brain, not hers.

He engaged a room, undressed, switched the light off, reclothed himself in the dark, went quietly around the veranda to the vine-grown rear of the hotel, and lowered himself to the ground. Walking rapidly, he took a crooked alleyway to the native anchorage where he engaged a Kanaki boy to paddle him out to the Sally Scott.

He watched the quay. No one had followed him. He was certain of that. Riding through the cool night, the boat scarcely rocking beneath the Kanaki's smooth paddle strokes, he sat and dreamed, remembering the night he had seen the girl and talked to her. Nana— Van Hoog's young wife. It had never occurred to him to think of her as Mrs. Van Hoog or *Mrs.* anybody. She was English, of course, on her father's side, and quarter native, quarter anything from her mother, Penland's half-native wife. Nana was beautiful, young, smooth, and brown. She was only twenty or twenty-one, but she was smart beyond her

years, the way women in the Islands so often are, maturing early, especially if they have a dram of the dark blood.

Nana, pretty and young and smart—the way a man dreamed an Island girl should be and so seldom found them. She had been away at Manila at a convent school when Van Hoog came to form the partnership with her father and miraculously raise the plantation from bankruptcy. Van Hoog wasn't the bankrupt kind. Van Hoog had put Penland on his feet, he had put him in the big dough, and if the truth were known, had murdered him shortly thereafter.

Only the mooring lights showed aboard the Sally Scott. The Kanaki brought his sampan up beneath her rusty side, and Dougherty, through cupped hands, called "Ahoy!" There was a whisper of bare feet and a sailor looked down on him. "Is the captain aboard?"

"No, please. You, Dougherty?"

It gave him a jolt, as though his arrival had been anticipated.

"Aye." He climbed a ratladder to the deck. The sailor proved to be a bright-appearing young native of about twenty-five, dressed only in shorts and a topee. His features were quite like a European's, but he was probably native to Sangi or the adjacent coast of Celebes, where some of the salt-water boys were almost Caucasian in appearance.

Dougherty said, "I recall your face but the name escapes me."

"John."

"Aye, an honest name."

"I am a Christian, tuan. When the minister baptized me, he named me John. I am washed in the blood of the Lamb."

His simplicity was touching. "Lad, lad!" said Dougherty with a laugh. "And on this ship! What dealings do you have with a scoundrel like Jaske?"

"Some day I will convert him to God."

"Does he pay you?"

"A hundred fifty guilder the month!"

"On credit, I'll wager."

"He is banking it with post office savings in Singapore. When I have saved three thousand Straits dollars I am going back to Manado and get married."

You poor devil, thought Dougherty, he is cheating you of every penny of it.

He asked. "Is he here?"

"Soon, maybe."

"I will wait in his quarters."

Dougherty seated himself in Jaske's filthy little cabin, a light on until the mosquitoes became troublesome, and then in the dark. He dozed and awaked at the sound of Jaske's feet on the deck just outside; then the light came on, blinding him.

Jaske stood in the door and said, "Yes, damn, it's the Yank like Brother John said!"

Jaske was medium in height, fifty, and skinny with a jackal face. He was grinning, showing his rotting, betel-stained teeth. A ship's officer's cap was perched on one side of his head; he was dressed in some odds and ends of a ship's officer's uniform. On his feet were tennis shoes without laces, so he had to walk with dragging movements to keep them from falling off.

"Aye, Captain," said Dougherty, standing, towering over him in the low cabin. "We meet again."

"With money in your kick, I'll wager. And a secret worth a million. One of these times you'll bring me luck. Percentage—it can't always be against me."

"Well," said Dougherty with long consideration, "I wouldn't be too certain of that."

Jaske soured a trifle. He kept watch of Dougherty while slap-slapping around in the tennis shoes and getting a bottle of gin from his head locker.

"No, Yank. You're givin' me the old lolly-doo. You wouldn't fizzle out on your old friend Jaske. Oh, we've had our tiffs I'll admit, matter of 'igh spirits mainly. By Gawd, we *'ave* 'ad our innings! You remember the time I landed those guns on Flores and you paid me off in counterfeit Hong Kong dollars?"

"Indeed, sir," said Dougherty with a deep chuckle, "you must believe me that I was unaware—"

"The hell you were, you were out to take me that time. I'd 'ave killed you that time, Frisco, if I'd caught up with you. I would. I'd 'ave put a blade through your bladder so you'd made water in two directions.

"The point is, sir, the money was excellent. I took it in good faith from a Chinese who was supplying those Republican rebels, and in passing it on to you I did it in

the spirit of necessity, well knowing you would have no trouble passing it in turn, which you did, and you well—"

"Hah! They empounded it at their dirty bank at Soerabaja, that part I showed 'em. I'm still 480 pounds the loser on that, and it's still on the cuff if you want to know it, Yank."

"Well, indeed. You can charge it off against the time you rifled my baggage when I was hiding you away from the police in Makassar."

"I never rifled your baggage, damn you." All the saturnine good humor was gone from Jaske's manner now; his eyes fairly popped from his head, the corners of his mouth were twisted. "It was that thieving Buginese boy you kept around spying for you. That's w'at it was, or one of the women you led up there, brown girls, yellow girls, 'af castes, anything that'd climb in bed with you. You dirty swine, lock me out on the veranda amongst the mosquitoes whilst you played with the girls, and then have the gall to accuse me of rifling your bloomin' billybag for three thousand two hundred lousy Island guilder—"

"Sir, then how did you know the exact amount?"

"Keep away from me. If I 'ad of taken it, *if* I 'ad, mind you, it'd only been my due. Yes, it would. You and that diamond big as a damn hawk's egg you took off the Chink in Malipur. I was entitled to a split on that, a third anyhow, a 'af if you'd been true to your friends that risked their lives for you—"

"You swine, you left me for dead."

"No, Yank, that's not true. I thought you was dead and tried to save my own life, and save my ship. A man gets to feeling that way about his ship. I'm telling you, if the old Sally ever went down I'd go down with her', I—"

Dougherty laughed derisively. "This rust bucket! You'd sink it for the insurance if you ever found an agent mad enough to write policy on it."

"If I was a Yank, and thank Gawd I'm not, but if I *was*, I'd be the last person in the world to talk about selling my scruples for money."

He stood holding the gin. It was evident that he wished now he hadn't got it out.

"Yes, Yank, the more I think about that Malipur

business the more I think I should have got a cut on it, and I still got it coming to me."

"I gave the stone away. To its rightful owners."

"Hah!"

"Very well, you doubt me, but it's true. And sometime, if we're ever in Singapore together, I'll prove that it's true."

"All right, we'll forget about it." He banged the gin bottle down like a period ending that phase of their association. "Now to the business at hand. What did you find at Tengah?"

"Aye," said Dougherty with a long exhalation. "That!"

"What do you mean? Say, maybe you never went to Tengah at all. Why, damn your Yankee guts if you borrowed money off me and spent it all on a wing-ding in the fleshpots of 'Massin—"

"Your accusations cease to amuse me. If you'll keep your tongue still for a while—"

"No, I'm not keeping my tongue still, I got money invested in this and—"

"Keep quiet!"

"You never went there at all. Then, damn you, you can fork over the money I gave you and—"

Dougherty's right hand shot out. Jaske tried to get away but he was cornered in the little room and Dougherty's superior size and reach gave him no chance. Dougherty seized him by the front of his blouse. He lifted him and dragged him over an intervening chair that banged to the floor. Jaske tried to swing the gin bottle, but Dougherty batted it from his hand. It struck the bed without breaking. Jaske tried to reach inside his jacket pocket; there was a small automatic pistol there as Dougherty knew, and to keep him from getting it he lifted his feet off the floor and rammed him across the edge of the bolted-down table. Pain and shock made Jaske lift his hand from his pocket. Dougherty pinned his legs with his knee and bent him over the edge little by little.

"Damn you, lemme go," Jaske hissed. "You gorilla! You dirty, strong-arm gorilla."

"I warn you," said Dougherty with his lips close to his ear, bending him a little more, "that I will tolerate no more of your accusations. No one is trying to double-cross you."

"No, not *you*. You didn't give me the double-o. Diamond, big as a pigeon egg."

"Quiet!"

"All right."

"Promise."

"Yes!" he gasped. Pain would have made him promise anything.

Dougherty released him. He was sweating. He moved back, hooked the chair with his toe putting it back on its legs, sat down. He mopped his face with a handkerchief. He kept watch of Jaske who still had the pistol in his pocket. He had little apprehension, however. Jaske might shoot him one day, but it would not be from anger or for revenge. Jaske would kill him when there was a pound, shilling and pence reason for it. He knew what made Jaske tick; he had known Jaske a long time.

Jaske, with hands rubbing the small of his back, walked around the small space available to him and cursed under his breath. Finally he retrieved the gin bottle and poured himself a drink. He was shaky and the drink didn't help much. He said in a whispery voice over a vocal mechanism long eroded by alcohol, "I was going to offer a drink to you, you Yankee son-of-a-bitch. Yes, I've seen the day I'd go all out for you, but from now on you could die in the alley with your tongue black and ants crawling in and out of your umbilicus for all I give a merry hoot. I've done my last favor for you. When I think of all I done for you!" The memory of it, and his realization of man's ingratitude, was too much for Jaske and he had to sit down on the bed. "What I think of the old Ripper from Minnesota, a friend of the both of us, and 'im lying dead in his grave, and you walking off with that diamond, 'is share, and my share, and your share, all three—now, don't blow your gasket. Don't start roughing me up again. I ain't going to fight with you. I just wanted you to know I'd learned my lesson the hard way. Well, I *have* learned, and it's cold business without sentiment between the two of us from *'ere* on."

Dougherty laughed and said, "I've known you for these few seasons and it is my studied estimate that you have the kind of sentiment that would allow you to exhume your own grandmother and sell her to the fertilizer people for the amount of calcium in her bones." Then he asked, "Well, where is the girl?"

"Who, my grand—"

"No, you fool, the girl."

"Well, she's around," Jaske said reluctantly.

"Same place?"

He did not answer.

"And that man of hers—that cowardly Fawley?"

"'E's 'ere."

"I asked if they were at the same place."

"And I didn't say. It seems to me you're asking the questions when you should be giving the answers."

He waited.

"Did you ever get word to Van Hoog?" asked Jaske.

"A word!" Dougherty laughed bitterly and turned so Jaske could see the bruise-streaked side of his face. He pulled down the lid of his left eye showing it still purple. "Does that look like I had been taking my ease in Bandjermasin?"

Jaske gloated a little. "Met your match. Found out on your own how it is to be kicked around."

"Yes, I was at Tengah, and I got word to him. I was inside the compound. I did that. I did what you didn't have the guts to do. I risked my life while you sat here safe and snug."

"Brains and brawn. They each 'ave a place."

"Bah!"

"So you met 'im! You met Van Hoog!" The sharp, jackal, eager look had returned to his face. "You were inside the compound, you say? You found something?"

"I *found* something. I found out the quality of man we have to deal with. Yes, Van Hoog. A *man*. A real, honest-to-God man! Not what you pictured to me. Not a dumb brute, a fat Dutchman with a rhino hide and a rhino mind. You still think that? Allow me, sir, to disillusion you. He is not fat. He is strong, and he is not old, and he is smart. And I will tell you something else about him—he is *here*. Yes, at this very minute."

"Are you crazy? You mean you brought him here?"

"I was helpless to do otherwise."

Jaske fairly screamed at him, "You double-crossed us? You brought 'im 'ere to turn her over to 'im?"

"I told you I was unable to do otherwise."

"But we got to keep her away from the bloke. She's our trump card, the only hold we have on 'im. As long as we know where she is and he doesn't—"

"Wait! Have you ever been stretched, manacled, on the floor while a man kicks you in the head? Have you ever escaped barefoot through the jungle, and then when freedom seems within the reach of your hand found instead a leveled machine gun ready to tear you apart? That atop of malaria? Well, so it was with me. At Tengah, at the hands of that man. I did what any man would do, and had to do. I recognized the odds against me and made the necessary allowances. I offered to cooperate. I brought him here. We came quietly. We came tonight, after dark. He has built a grudging trust in me. He even allowed me to take a gun and go ashore by myself—"

"He followed you. Say, if he followed you 'ere—"

"No. I am not so great a fool."

He breathed and sat down again. He blew his lips and had another go at the gin. "Well, maybe. I wanted to stay outside of this. Not that I'm scared of 'im, you understand. But, well. Anyhow, now what? Now you got 'im 'ere, where do we go?"

"I was hoping we might talk her into going back with him."

"That's what we got to prevent."

"No, you are quite wrong. She must go back with him. I have done some deep thinking on this matter. He has a secret, he is suspicious as a rogue tiger, as clever and as dangerous. Wealth to him is more than money; it is a means to an end. Oh, I have not been idle, I have learned a thing or two. *Haringpakker, Haringpakker, hoe maakt uwe visch het!*"

"What in the 'oly 'ell are you talkin' about?"

Dougherty jerked his big shoulders with a laugh. He felt better. He was certain now that Jaske, at least, would go along with him.

"A poem I learned, a trivial, childish poem, and yet, who knows, it may be the key to millions, a key to the soul of a millionaire. Aye, she must go back to him. She must be shown that that is the only way, the way to get what is *hers*, the secret of the Tengah plantation."

"Well, maybe." Jaske seemed beat-out and tired. The gin only served to depress him more. He sat and rubbed his eyes with the heel of his hand. "You got inside and didn't learn a damned thing? What cargo is he shipping from there?"

"Nothing. A few sampans of rubber. A little sago. Five hundred sterling a year for that, yet we see Van Hoog's name emblazoned on the water front beside Jardines in Hong Kong! No, Tengah is only a blind. I know that, anyone would know that. A blind and a poor one to boot."

"Diamonds?" Jaske asked, lifting his head hopefully.

"Why would he keep *mining* of any sort a secret? What if he *was* mining diamonds, gold, even uranium? In the inland to escape the duty, perhaps, but in British territory? No. It is very peculiar. I say she must go back with him. He is a clever man, merciless and smart, but he has that one weakness."

"And that's the little woman," Jaske said, brightening to the idea.

Dougherty thought about it, looking far off as though the wall were not there and he could see the horizon of the sea. "No, not even her. I summed it up for you, my captain, in that bit of childish jingle, if you had the wit to follow it. And now, if you will tell me where she can be found."

"Same as ever, the Freisland, only you better walk easy because she'll put a hole through you with that little .38 she carries. She will if she gets wind you led Van Hoog into port. And w'at do you mean you summed it all up for me in that fool Dutch if I 'ad the wit to follow it?"

Dougherty laughed and went on deck repeating the jingle to himself.

Chapter Six

IT WAS VERY late. A slight mist lay over the jungle, but there was still no sign of dawn. Dougherty awakened the Kanaki boy, who was asleep in the bottom of the sampan, and rode to shore. He walked through deserted, crooked streets, the garbage-smelling streets of the native city, and reached the boulevard. It was a wide street, shaded by towering kanari trees set out by the Dutch traders more than a hundred years ago. Large frame bungalows sat back from the street, each inside its own yard, surrounded by a fence, each looking neat and orderly as Dutch things always are, even in the tropics, but Dougherty knew that the light of day would reveal most of them to be in ruins, the jungle growing through their floors, their walls and roofs the homes of thatch snakes and ghekkos. After two-hundred years of rule, the days of the Dutch were drawing to a close, the days of the white man were drawing to a close.

The hotel stood at the end of the boulevard. The Friesland. Once it had been the great resort of the island's southwestern coast, a place where wealthy planters came to spend their declining years in Dutch-Oriental splendor, to sit and grow fat on rich pork, fish-egg and butter curries, and enjoy the luxury of ice brought in by ship from the Norway fjords half the globe away, but now its formal garden was jungle, its famed Grecian pillars had been redecorated to the taste of its Chinese proprietors in a violent pink and blue, and the place had the smell of Chinese ownership, too.

"It has occurred to me," Dougherty muttered to himself, "that the Chinese are the most acquisitive businessmen, the greatest potters, the most complete philosophers, and the most deplorable hotel men on the face of the earth."

A night light burned in the lounge, but no one was in sight. Already familiar with the place, Dougherty climbed the stairs to the second-story veranda. A single, fly-spotted electric bulb hung on a cord, guiding him. The veranda was deeply covered by bougainvillea,

making a wall on the garden side. He turned a corner; the light there was burned out, and he had to grope his way, feeling from one door to another. This, he thought, is hers. He stood quietly beneath the slanted shutter leaves, listening. There was no sound, but a slight perfume touched his nostrils, *her* perfume, a reminder of his previous visit. It gave him an uncomfortable moment; then, summoning his resolve, he rapped.

Her voice came in answer, almost instantly, just on the other side of the door, as though she had been standing there, waiting for him.

"I should shoot you!" she said, and she laughed a little. She had a smooth voice, rather low in pitch, and she spoke English in the manner of one who had learned from an Englishman rather than an American.

A bolt rattled and the door opened. A ghost of light entered a window on the other side of the room, giving him a vague impression of her in silhouette, a small girl, a robe around her shoulders, her hair pulled down smooth, tied in the back. She still, apparently, thought Dougherty was someone else.

"No!" she said with a trace of contempt in her voice. "You're not full of grog again! Clint, if you ran out with that money and spent it on grog—" She stopped, evidently hit by her first suspicion that this might not be Clinton Fawley after all.

She started back with a violent movement, and Dougherty, fearing the gun that Jaske had mentioned, fearing she might slam and lock the door, made a blind reach, seized her by one wrist, and with a twist made her bend to her knees.

"Girl, girl! Don't scream!" He was wrong there, she was not going to scream, she was not the type who screamed. "It is I, Dougherty. Frisco Dougherty. I am alone. Alone. Only Dougherty. I am your friend, girl."

She stopped fighting him, but still he held her, making sure. He came inside, hooked the door with his heel, swung it shut. Now he could not see a thing, but he could hear her quick breathing.

"I'm sorry, girl. You can understand why I wanted no commotion." He laughed, easing his grasp. "You can understand that I didn't want one of those .38 slugs through me!"

She whispered, "Let me go!"

"No gun, promise?"

"Yes."

He released her. She got to her feet and retreated. He followed. The light went on: it seemed very bright. He looked but she was not where he expected her, and when he *did* see her, there she was with the little, bulldog revolver clutched in her hand.

He laughed and said, "Aye, you'll take care of yourself, my dear. *Anywhere!*"

She clutched the gun very tightly, she bent over it, her hand pressed against her abdomen. She moved around, her back to the wall, and bolted the door.

"Where is he?" she said.

"Who?" he asked, thinking of Van Hoog.

"Clinton."

"How would I know? I haven't seen him."

"He never stayed away before. Not without telling me." She waited for Dougherty to say something.

"My dear, how would I—"

"Why *tonight?* Why the very night *you* came back?"

Yes, thought Dougherty, why tonight? He said, "A happenstance. It has no significance."

"You sent him away!"

"No."

Fawley had probably got wind of Van Hoog's arrival and fled, Dougherty thought. She had mentioned him running out with some money. That would be Fawley's trick, Fawley, the ne'er-do-well, Fawley the coward. That, or else Van Hoog had killed him.

She took a deep, deep breath. She seemed, in exhaling, to shudder a little. She lowered the gun. She decided to lay it on the table near at hand. At last she was able to smile.

"Aye," said Dougherty, and he breathed too. "One must learn to recognize one's friends and trust them. I can understand what a fright I gave you."

"When did you get back?"

"Tonight."

"Last night!"

It was almost morning. "Last night."

"You *did* go to Tengah?"

He nodded.

"You saw him?" She meant Van Hoog, and he nodded again. "He is well?" He kept nodding and she laughed

bitterly. "How could he be anything except well? Others can die of jaundice, blackwater. Others can be bitten by cobras or they can hang themselves. But not *him*, not *my darling husband!*"

"He loves you a great deal." Dougherty sat down and looked at her. She *was* beautiful. When she moved, she displayed a leopard's sinuous grace; she had a slim waist and broad hips and fine, high breasts. She had been in bed—he could see the tumbled coverlet through the mosquito netting—she had probably heard his feet on the veranda, the tremble as he walked and paused at the door, and his pause had given her time to arise and slip the sari-like robe around her shoulders. It was probably all she had on. It gave him a slightly giddy, sweaty feeling thinking it was all she had on. He controlled it and went on, "Do not fool yourself about why he wants you back, my dear. He has visions of you in silks and ermine, in diamonds, on his arm in Holland, at the symphony."

"So you got that far with him!" she said.

She seemed younger tonight and not so sure of herself. She had only a quarter of Javanese blood, but one would think she had more. Her hair was very dark, her skin brown, as brown as many a Chinese, but different, a brown with glints of color. Her eyes were broad-set, soft and dark.

His eyes made her nervous and she pulled the robe more snugly around her, accentuating her slim waist. She shook a cigarette from a packet of Royal Bengals, scratched a match, and puffed a deep lungful of smoke, all the while watching him. "Well," she said, talking the smoke from her lips, "what did you learn?"

"I learned that we are dealing with a very rich, a very clever, and a very deadly person."

"I told you that when I talked to you before."

"I had it called even more forcibly to my attention."

She gave his bruised face a quick scrutiny and smiled. "So. I'll wager you never got farther than Red's beer garden. I'll wager you said something to him and he cracked a chair over your head."

"No, we were the *greatest* of friends. I was his guest inside the compound. He dined me before manacling my arms and kicking me in the face with his bush boots."

"Oh?"

"What is it he keeps in that locked building, the concrete building, the one lighted by floods and guarded day and night?"

"If I knew that I wouldn't have needed you."

"My dear, this was not a task to perform as we tried, on the spur of the moment, without plans. Let's face it, I went and I was a failure. I learned nothing—nothing definite. But I did learn *this*—that he is more powerful and much richer than either of us dreamed. A man with connections all over the Orient. Even here, in this back-bush port. Why? To what purpose? We have lost a battle but not the war. We must approach him more cleverly. Now, I am not without connections throughout the East. You have heard of Wuch'ang, my dear? The Chinese organization, the underground railway with a finger in every racket in the Orient?"

"Everyone has heard of Wuch'ang."

"I have connections. I will tell you this, what I have told no one before. I have been at times their agent. They have the utmost trust in me. No, not just their agent here, or in Bandjermasin, but at Wuch'ang's seat of power, in Singapore itself."

She laughed and said, "Van Hoog has his connections, too. Mysterious Chinese visitors. What if—"

He waved her to silence, thinking she was only trying to needle him. "Please! Wuch'ang is very big, world-wide in scope, it handles black cargo to the extent of millions every fortnight. And when another, under their noses, quietly and without explanation accumulates a fortune—you see what I am saying?"

"You mean you'll interest Wuch'ang and they'll do the work for us. Maybe they'll take the money, too."

She was very sharp; in talking to her he had the disquieting sensation that her mind was with him and beyond him, far beyond.

He said, "They live with the rackets, they do not perpetrate them. Wuch'ang will take only its share."

"Very well, go to them."

"It is not only that. You must also go back to *him*."

His words hit her like a slap. Anger brought a sharp, feline intensity to her face. "Why, you—" she whispered and pounced for the gun. Dougherty, half suspecting such a response, reached with his toe, caught the table, and jerked it so the gun skidded to the floor. She tried

to pounce on it, but he kicked it away from her hand just as she had it in her grasp. She got to her feet and he seized her by both wrists.

She twisted to get free. She was stronger than he imagined and she almost got away, but he pushed her against the wall where his weight was too much for her.

"Girl, girl! Listen to reason. All I ask is a month. Six weeks at most. A visit to Singapore, and you in Tengah. Believe me, he will do anything for you. Anything! I will find you there. We will arrange some means of communication."

"Get out!"

"My dear, listen to reason—"

"Get out!" She bent suddenly and sank her teeth in his forearm. Pain and surprise made him let go and retreat, and the next instant she was around the table, against the wall, and there was the gun in her hand. She cocked it, and for a startled second of terror he thought she would pull the trigger. "Get out!"

"Aye, girl. I'll go. I meant you no harm." He retreated, one slow step after another, making no sharp move, nothing that would startle the tenseness of her finger.

"Wait!" she said. "Where is Clint?"

"Fawley?" He knew she meant Fawley, but he wanted time to think which was the safer, a lie or the truth?

"You saw him! You frightened him away. You thought I'd be easier to deal with without him!"

"He is safe, believe me. I'll send him to you."

She spoke through her teeth, emphasizing each word, "Don't bother. I hate him. I hate him—and you. Rotters, all of you! Maybe Van Hoog is the best of all."

Chapter Seven

DOUGHERTY WAS OUTSIDE. He closed the door. He was slightly dizzy; the cool air helped. He realized how frightened he had been. The gun, its black, deadly muzzle aimed to tear his heart out, and her finger on the trigger—so taut it made the gun barrel dance!

There was a slight glow of dawn now. Through rifts in the bougainvillea, it made the veranda seem darker than ever, He walked around, beneath the fly-speckled light, down the stairs. His arm pained him where her teeth had drawn blood. He wrapped a handkerchief around it. He had passed the dim lounge and started across the garden along the path of white shell when he was struck by the certainty that he was being followed. He kept walking, not altering his pace, not looking back. He would reach the street, he thought, and double back sharply, following one of the garden paths to the alleyway in the rear. But a man loomed suddenly to block his way—a huge, powerfully built man—Van Hoog!

"Mynheer!" cried Van Hoog when he saw Dougherty's reflexive movement toward the shoulder holster. "No. Make not that mistake. You are no longer so valuable to me alive."

Bodoh was behind him. Bodoh had been in the shadows and Dougherty had gone by almost in arm's reach. Stooped and splay-footed Bodoh came, not with the bolt-action tonight, only a knife, a machete almost the size of a scimitar.

"Do you think, sir," said Dougherty, doing a masterly job of controlling his voice, "that I was not well aware I was being followed?"

Van Hoog apparently did not know whether to believe this or not. "Eh, goot! You are smart. You are a hard man to fool!" Bodoh, the machete still in his hand, stood at Dougherty's back, and Van Hoog let him continue standing there. "My wife, she is here?"

"Aye."

"Mit—him?"

"Of course not. He is gone."

Van Hoog lifted his head in a sign of receiving a pleasant surprise. "So? You are sure?"

"Did you not yourself tell me that she would tire of him? Come, sir, don't you realize how anxious she is to be taken back?"

"You mean it, eh? You mean it?" He was almost like a child, almost pleading with Dougherty to convince him, he *wanted* so to be convinced. "She really cares for me after all! So! She has had her fling, she has learned her lesson, now I am willing to forget it all. Everything. So now you see I am not such a bad fellow after all. Does she know I am here? You told her?"

"Aye," said Dougherty. "It is my guess she knows you are in port."

"She talked about me? What did she say?"

"Why don't you see her for yourself?"

"Which room? Where?"

"Ask Bodoh, I am quite sure he followed me." Dougherty then remembered the postdated check and took it from his pocket, "But first—"

"Afterward, Mynheer. Afterward!"

Dougherty watched him go, alone, to disappear up the stairs to the veranda. Bodoh stood at his back with the machete ready, held underhand, the sharp edge up, ready, and Dougherty was thinking how he might, if he chose, leap and draw and turn and kill him. No, he thought, Bodoh would be no match for me. And Van Hoog. Perhaps when the chips are down he would be no match for me, either.

He waited, waited for the crash of the revolver, *her* revolver, the tiny bulldog gun of the big caliber. He waited holding the handkerchief around his forearm, feeling the throb of pain, thinking he should go to the chemist's and get sulfa on the wound. He waited as dawn grew, and there was no sound from the hotel, no sound at all.

"You see?" he said to the deaf Bodoh, "am I not a man of my word? You see how ridiculous it was to distrust me and meet me here with that scimitar?"

It was daylight and people were moving along the street, causing Bodoh to pull back into the shadows reluctantly hiding his machete. Dougherty walked back along the boulevard with an empty, gutless feeling, a

whipped-cur feeling. He had turned her over to Van Hoog; *her*, the girl who was fool enough to trust him.

He entered the terrace of the Hoofdstraat Huis. There was a smell of frying food, and a lean, big-eared, bespectacled man sat munching Melba toast, eating hard fried eggs so tiny each was a single mouthful, reading a copy of the South China Morning Post, a Hong Kong paper, only a day old, flown in on the twice-weekly plane from Palembang. It occurred to Dougherty that he'd had no supper the night before, but food was not what he needed.

He had gin and tonic. It bucked him up a little but not much. He sat at a table, half hidden by a potted cabbage palm, and looked at Van Hoog's check, creased and sweat-bent the shape of his leg from long carrying, postdated, worthless if Van Hoog wished to give the word. He ordered another drink, and another. He sat over the table, a huge man, hunched and morose, liquor and lack of sleep giving an added fierceness to his deep-set eyes, making him look older than his thirty-odd years.

He sat there as the heat of late morning settled, and suddenly he straightened and looked around, hearing his name. He blinked getting his eyes and mind to focus, and there was Van Hoog, a smiling Van Hoog, a triumphant and almost handsome Van Hoog.

"Ah, Mynheer!" cried Van Hoog. He sniffed over the gin glass. "So early in the morning? Take my advice, drink only at night. The white man who starts his day with liquor will find his future days in the tropics to be numbered." He sat down with the rattan chair creaking under him. "Come, come! Haven't you a good morning for Van Hoog?"

Dougherty sat far back in his chair, his elbows on the arm rests, his coat open, the Luger within reach if he wanted it. Aye, he was thinking. I should kill him, and I would were it not for those Island police who would like nothing better than to try to execute a white man.

He said, "Good morning, sir! You have been reunited with your wife. She welcomed you, then, cordially enough?"

Van Hoog laughed. He felt like flinging his arms and stretching his muscles and he did. "Of course, of course! Did you have any doubt? It was exactly as you said. She had her fill of that fellow, that playboy, that no-good,.

that nothing. Now she has had her escapade. Perhaps it taught her a lesson, perhaps it was all for the good!"

Dougherty thought, Poor girl, what could she do, cast adrift in this mad-and-slat port, broke, friendless, deserted and robbed by the man she trusted?

He said, "I have coming to me a very paltry amount of money if you remember our bargain."

"Of course. Have you ever heard of *Van Hoog* welching on an agreement? Never!" He looked at the check Dougherty pushed toward him. He tore it up. He put the pieces in his coat pocket and drew out another one, signed and dated as of the present. "Read the amount!" he said proudly.

It was for an extra two hundred dollars. "Your munificence," said Dougherty, "stuns me. And now, sir, I beg the privilege of getting drunk in the company of no one except myself."

Van Hoog departed. With each drink the gin seemed to become more acid in character. He stood, hurled his glass across the terrace, and beat the table with his fist. "Cognac! Boy, a bottle of cognac!" It came, cheap Morocco, and he sent the boy running back with it. "Cognac. *French* cognac. Cordon Bleu! You have it? Damn it, tell your manager that I'm no bankrupt beachcomber. I'm Dougherty, San Francisco, and this is farewell." He sat down, sweating from exertion beneath the wet blanket of midday heat. "This is farewell," he muttered. "This steam-oven country, this knife-in-the-back country." The boy came back with a bottle of Hennessey and Dougherty, with a glance at the label, nodded his head. "Aye, boy. I'm sorry. I'm at the end of my temper today. I've had an exhausting experience. Here's a five-pound note for you, boy."

It was genuine Hennessey and very smooth. He kept drinking. He sent for a Chinese money merchant who came carrying a black leather brief case with various currencies in neat little bundles held by rubber bands.

"American!" said Dougherty laying down the check. "Only American! I'll spend it in San Francisco. San Francisco, I can see it, sir, from Nob Hill, its clean stone skyscrapers rising from the fog, clear, crisp, and bright, no smog, sir, nothing of your Los Angeles corruption, just fog, the sea washing against stone, after how many years of this, this swamp and miasma!"

The Chinese kept smiling and nodding and looking at the check. "Excuse!" he said and went somewhere. He came back, asked for Dougherty's endorsement, and paid over the money, all in twenty-dollar American bills. It made a thick roll in Dougherty's pocket.

A ship was in port delivering wire rope, casing, and a quantity of steel rods for a drilling outfit up the P'wan. Dougherty drank with a big Norwegian sailor from Seattle. They were joined by other sailors. He found himself at the piano, playing while the sailors sang:

"Ay bane a hard worker,
A halibut yerker,
All up Queen Charlotte sound;
Ay wear a red collar,
Ay ain't got a dollar,
Yust bane for Prince Rupert bound!"

He shot dice. He visited one sing-song house after another. He danced with a beautiful, doll-like Namese girl. He lost all track of time. He was back at the Hoofdstraat, the sailors gone, everyone gone. He sat alone at the piano. He kept playing the right-hand portion of some piece over and over without being able to fit the left with it, or even knowing what he was playing.

An excited cry from one of the native waiters pierced his consciousness. He turned and stood, realizing that *she* was coming toward him.

"Nana!" he said, thick-tongued. Then he saw the reason for the waiter's excitement. In her hand was the little bulldog pistol.

Awakening and sobering was like an explosion inside his brain. He cried, "No, you little fool, wait, it was all for the best, you could have driven him away—"

She laughed. The bitter quality of the laugh stopped him. It told him how useless it was to talk, how her mind was already made up, that she intended to kill him.

"You collected from *him!* Now collect from *me!*" And she pulled the trigger.

"No!" He got the one word out, started to lunge for the gun as it crashed with a burst of flame. He felt himself being carried around as though caught on the

spinning disc of the floor. The lights of the room were spinning. He no longer had size or shape. He was nothing, with sounds all mixed rising like a siren in his ears, but through it all, the last thought in his mind, the laughing thought that this was it, the thing of his sick dread, and yet, after all, it was a small thing to die.

Chapter Eight

THE SOUND HAD been interminable. It was a hot sound on the lifeless air. It droned and stopped and droned on again. It kept that up, starting and stopping, for hours, days, endlessly. Dougherty lay on his back, beneath the mosquito curtain, in the still heat, his mind between waking and sleeping, and the sound had become part of the thirst and fever of his being.

He realized that the curtains had parted, and someone was speaking.

"What?" he asked.

"Shot in the arm, tuan. Sawbones say penicillin. Fifty buck penicillin, keep 'em all in icebox. Very much big dough, don't waste damn drop, you lay still I give you shot in the arm, hey?"

Dougherty's eyes painfully came to focus on a kinky-haired Island youth, grinning with all his teeth, a hypodermic syringe in one hand, keeping the needle point up and a drop of liquid flowing.

"Aye!" Dougherty said with a long exhalation, his eyes almost closed.

"Plenty muscle in tuan's arm. Plenty damn muscle." Dougherty did not even feel the needle, only the slight sting afterward, and the cold swab of alcohol on his skin. "Some skinny fella, him got to take penicillin in hind end. Tuan big fella, plenty arm. You get up pretty soon now, eh? You plenty sick, white woman shoot hell out your insides."

"Aye!" said Dougherty. He was awake now, able to think, to resolve things to their proportions, and he recognized the recurring drone to be a winch on the Netherlands East wharf. "That winch, damn them! It's been going for days."

"No, tuan! You dream, I guess. Just since that steamship Sunda come in, morning-half I guess."

"How long have I been here?"

"Four-five days."

"Where is *she?*"

"Oh, missy? She who try make cold bully- beef out you?

Don' know. Big fella, him want to know, too. Big fella him try kill you twice find out where missy go."

Dougherty tried to sit up, but the pain knifing his breast made him fall back in a faint and he had to wait for the fever to leave him again.

"She escaped him?" he whispered and he twisted his lips in a laugh. Aye, she was a match for Van Hoog, for anyone. A she out of the jungle, that one!

The boy said, "I guess she do, I don' know. You maybe want to eat now?"

Dougherty sent him away. He slept. He awakened with better strength and appetite. The bullet had hit in the right lung, but it had gone through in a merciful, steel-jacketed manner, leaving him tissue to breathe with. There was no hemorrhage or complications, and the penicillin had cleared up the infection that had set in where her teeth had wounded his arm. A couple of days later he was able to get up and locate his things.

His wallet was empty, but twenty-one twenty-dollar bills were wadded in the side pocket of his trousers. He had spent some, been robbed of the rest. He was a fool, but the thought that she had escaped Van Hoog made him feel better. He inquired without learning more. She had shot him and disappeared. Van Hoog, like a mad gorilla, had torn through the town searching for her, and he too had dropped from sight. An Indonesian state policeman visited him, stiffly formal, to express regret that his attacker had gone unpunished and to assure him that his privileges, as an American national, under Republican rule, were no less than under that of the Dutch, and Dougherty bought him a drink and sent him away. He walked the streets, gaunt from fever, hunched to one side, favoring the wound. The Sally Scott was gone, Jaske was gone. Dougherty was on the beach, forgotten, left for dead in that island port, and he cursed them all—all but the girl who had given him what he damn well deserved. He thought of her. He closed his eyes against the day and tried to remember her as she had been that night in her room, the strange feeling he had when she answered, as if she had been waiting for *him*. He couldn't get it out of his brain that she had been waiting for him. He should have killed Van Hoog and taken her for himself, his woman, the way of the jungle! But they would meet again. Sitting at a

table, over cognac, he struck the tabletop a blow and resolved that they would meet again.

He paid up and secured passage to Bandjermasin. He found his old room at the hotel saved for him by Magistros, the manager, who smiled in his heavy-lipped way and said, "Why, I thought I would receive greetings from you in San Francisco, but look, you have come back, as they *all* come back, to Magistros who give them credit!"

His billybag was in the room, the same billybag he had left aboard the junk, forwarded by those dependable clerks of the Ah Hong Company. He rummaged aud found his copy of Boswell's "Life of Johnson," a mildewed, all-in-one volume that had served for years as practically his only reading matter. While completing his recovery, he read. He had been through Boswell's Johnson many times, under the diverse circumstances of his existence, and it never failed to fascinate him. It was apparently inexhaustible. Its grains of wisdom, buried haphazardly in its straw heaps of trivia, intrigued him. He enjoyed the sifting. He enjoyed sitting back and letting the cadences of the Johnsonian speech run from his tongue, and hence it had been Johnson more than anyone else who had conditioned his speech, giving it its antique, and often ridiculous grandeur.

He read and dozed and rationed his beer and rolled cigarettes of Sumatra with just a pinch from the gunja box to combat his recurring headache from malaria, and at last he decided exactly what he would do. He would learn for himself the secret that Van Hoog so jealously guarded, he would dispose of his information to those who would pay him the most, and somehow, somewhere he would meet *her* again.

His first move was to make inquiries through Wuch'ang, that far-flung organization which ruled the black markets of the East, and thus, during the next fortnight, he met with three Chinese, each of whom added, intentionally or otherwise, to his store of knowledge concerning Van Hoog. The first was his old acquaintance, Wu, of the W. H. Kung Company.

Wu said that several years ago, before the war, Van Hoog had been manager for one of the diamond mining outfits in the interior, but Dougherty already knew that.

Then Wu said, watching for Dougherty's reaction.

"He has been trading, I heard, with the Red Chinese." He was very suave in his manners, and one of the things he most liked to do was polish his fingernails. He did this now, on his coat sleeve, although they already had the highest brilliance. "Why are you so curious, Dougherty? Maybe you would welcome some of the fat profits that come through the communist trade?"

"With my own nephew lying dead to their treachery in Korea! I beg you, sir, don't joke with me on the subject. You know my feelings well enough concerning the Red Chinese."

When Dougherty showed further interest in the diamond matter, Wu would not enlarge but suggested that he visit a certain sago and ironwood dealer in Tempai, who as a sideline purchased a few stones from the native miners on a no-questions-asked basis. He even loaned Dougherty fifteen hundred,, American, of Wuch'ang's money, only asking for an assurance that any information concerning the mysterious Dutchman's affairs would be shared with the organization.

At the sleepy jungle port of Tempai he met the second Chinese. He was fat and middle-aged, dressed in a black sateen san and koo, and he sat looking at Dougherty through steel-rimmed glasses.

Dougherty nodded to him, and, picking up a writing brush from his desk, worked up some ink and with quick, practiced stabs formed the character for *yueh* which, with its seventeen strokes, is the longest the Chinese scribe had to deal with. It was the sign of Wuch'ang, and the effect it produced was instantaneous.

"Yes," the Chinese said, bowing, willing to answer every question. He remembered Van Hoog well. He had come from Holland, a great, hulking boy in his teens, a purser's assistant on the Hoofdman Line, jumping ship and securing employment with Coerojan Consolidated. A hard worker, a genius with figures. "There was great profit for my concern once Van Hoog became manager for Coerojan," he said, smiling. "Not like the hard times we are having now with scarcely a diamond coming our way! Are we to believe that thievery has passed from the face of the earth?"

Dougherty thought perhaps he was lying, that stolen diamonds were coming in the same as ever, but that

he was sneaking a few away from Wuch'ang to market independently. He asked more concerning Van Hoog and heard that after leaving the diamond fields he had been in the copal commissions, in petroleum, in the money exchange. When most of his fellow Dutch businessmen fled before the Jap surge into the South Pacific, Van Hoog had stayed behind, serving as middleman between them and the unoccupied islands. He was under house arrest for a time after the Japanese collapse, but his case never came before the tribunal and he had gone on to new ventures.

The Chinese had sent a boy for tea. He poured two-thirds of a cup for himself and for Dougherty, filling each with guri low. Then, inhaling the strong alcohol and perfume odor, he said, "He has the golden touch!"

"The golden touch at Tengah, that coast of poverty!"

"This too is a coast of poverty," said the Chinese and went on to complain that scarcely a hundred carats a month were these days trickling down to him from the placers. The mines were working, but thievery had stopped, or else a better market for stolen diamonds had developed.

"I will carry your feelings on the matter to Singapore if it is your wish," Dougherty said dryly. "I am only a poor agent of the organization, *at times* an agent. I make no policy."

He left. His ship had paused only to unload a crate or two and had sailed on to her next humble destination along the coast. He searched for passage to Singapore, to Java, to anywhere. Not a junk or even a sailing prahu had a destination that interested him. There was no hotel in the town, only a guest house left over from the old days when Tempai was a port of call for the Dutch Steam Packet Company. He found a cot, repaired the netting on a second-story room, and slept there. Dawn broke on a harbor unchanged since the day before. Only a weary, stern-wheel steamer arrived from the interior, hunting a course through the shifting channels of the mud-filled river. He ate tinned beef and hard bread at a Hindu store, and called on the Chinese but found him uncommunicative.

That night when crossing from some native huts to the deeply shadowed grounds of the guest house, a native boy, completely naked save for a shell bellyband,

shot out from the shadows and confronted him, his eyes large and frightened-looking, to whisper, "You give me twenty-fi' cent, tuan? You give me twenty-fi' cent I tell you something you want to know."

Dougherty thought he was merely the runner for some native prostitute. He was about to say no and go by, but the boy's short-of-breath, pop-eyed manner made him instead find the coin and give it to him.

"Aye, lad?"

"Don' go topside," whispered the boy, pointing to the guest house. "Go bed over town." And before Dougherty could stop him or ask a question he was gone at a scooting, bent-over run through some jasmine bushes.

Dougherty laughed, said, "A fool and his wealth!" and walked on through the gate to the old compound. The moon was out but it was very dark beneath the tall, untrimmed trees. The guest house was a huge, top-pointed shape, completely black save for its thatch roof silvered by the moon. He was guided by a path of crushed shell whose whiteness had a phosphorescent quality, much as though it had been coated by luminous paint like a watch dial. And there he felt the disquieting certainty of being watched.

The Luger was very reassuring beneath his coat. He checked his hand short of grasping it. He didn't believe it, of course, but if someone *was* out for him, it was important to show no suspicion, to indicate in no action that he had received a warning. He kept walking at exactly the same pace, not looking around, not turning his head from side to side. His pulse was racing and it seemed suddenly so hot he could hardly breathe. Then the shadows hid him and he experienced a deep relief.

He was a fool. No one had a reason for following him. No one except Wuch'ang knew the purpose of his visit. And as for Van Hoog having an agent here—that was preposterous. It was the climate, the emotional unsteadiness that is so often the aftermath of fever. He cursed the country. He had almost all of Wu's fifteen hundred left, it would take him back to San Francisco, it would land him there broke, but *home*. He kept walking. He no longer felt he was being watched. He was alone, alone with the rats, bats, and ghekkos in the old house.

The house stood on piles to give it the bottom ventilation which, in that low-lying country, was a necessity. He climbed three steps to the lower veranda. Ahead of him was the black well of the big lower floor which once had been lounge, dining room, and kitchen. At his left, vaguely visible in reflected moonlight, were some stairs to the upper story.

He climbed. Caution made him hesitate at the topmost step. There was a fluttering in the vines. It startled him, and again his pulse raced, and again he cursed himself, his nerves, this country, fever, quinine. The fluttering stopped. It was *chi-ka*, the same one that had sung with its cricket sound half the night before. He found his door. He opened it. Its hinges were broken and it dragged, making a scraping sound across the floor. The room was completely dark. He groped for the chair which he remembered was between the door and his bed. It was not where he expected it. Alarm hit him with a tingling in his toes and fingertips, then he found it, and his bed, and he had the feeling that he was alone in the room.

He groped around to make sure, bolted the door, and as an added bit of caution moved his cot and mosquito net from one side of the room to the other. Then, still without striking a light, he went to bed, stretching out gratefully.

A slight residue of nerves kept him awake for a while; then he dozed, coming suddenly awake.

It had not been a *sound;* it had been a movement, a tremble, the shifting of a heavy weight, a man's weight. He lay still, listening, waiting for the sound of feet that would tell him that some other person had arrived to share the poor hospitality of the guest house. All was quiet. He started to move, to reach for the gun under his pillow, and stopped. The hint of movement had come again, not on the stairs, and not on the veranda, not anywhere that it should be. He was baffled, but only for a second, for then he heard a whisper in the thatch and bamboo roof overhead.

He lay without breathing, watching, but the ceiling was an area of blackness. Minutes passed. He became aware of the rapid ticking of his watch. Then he saw a patch of night sky, a tiny pinpoint of sky, a glimpse so brief he might have thought it his imagination only

that at the same instant came the wind-whip and thud of a tiny, speeding object.

He had been long in Borneo, not only on the coast but among the bush tribes of the interior, and he knew what this was. It was the *whit-thud* of a blow-gun dart.

He got out of bed, through his ragged drape of mosquito curtain. His Luger was in his hand. He stooped on one knee, the gun aimed above, but he checked the impulse to fire. Then the sound came again and again, the wind-whip and thump of darts driven into the floor in the spot where his bed had been. He experienced a trapped, almost insuperable feeling of helplessness, then barefoot, garbed only in shorts, he ran to the veranda.

He wanted to lean out, hold to the supports, and get a glimpse of the high-slanting gable roof, but the vines formed a wall. He found some side stairs. He descended, in the dark, three steps at a time.

The steps were rotten. He crashed through one of the bottom ones and sprawled headlong, skinning both knees. He got up and was outside with a view of the roof, but there was nothing there.

The man had escaped over the ridge and down the other side. Dougherty ran; he kept in the shadow of the lower porch eaves. A form loomed in front of him so suddenly he had no time to lift his hands or alter his momentum before they collided.

They grappled. The man was as tall as Dougherty but not so strong. To make up for that he was lean and young and quick. He was a bush native with muscles like steel springs. He had a machete in his hand, its keen edge up, trying for a stroke that would have disemboweled his adversary, but Dougherty, through blind luck, had seized him by the wrist.

They reeled along beneath the eaves in a balance of strength. The native, realizing he was about to be caught against the wall, let his legs collapse and tried to get free to escape along the ground. He went down with a cat-twisty motion and almost slipped from Dougherty's grasp, but Dougherty, realizing instantly which way he was going, dropped with both knees, pinning him.

The native tried to bite him, but Dougherty had the upper hand now. He grabbed him by his hair and the

loose skin of his scalp, spun him over, and drove his face into the ground. He pulled both the fellow's arms around, crossed them behind him, placed one knee in his back.

"Who sent you to kill me?" hissed Dougherty. "Tell me, who?"

The man said something in the island tongue.

Dougherty twisted his arms, forced them higher along his back. "Who hired you?"

"No. Good boy, don't kill!"

Dougherty laughed through his teeth. "Asleep! You with your poisoned arrows. Kill while I *slept*. Easy, eh, kill while I slept!"

With each sentence he forced the arms higher. The fellow's back was tense as a bent bow, his shoulder blades projected grotesquely high. Pain made his breath come with a whining, wheezing sound.

"Who hired you?" Dougherty kept saying, "Who?"

Suddenly the fellow's left arm broke with a sharp *crack!* He cried out in pain. "No, no! Chinese do, Chin Tseng!"

Chin Tseng, the buyer of stolen diamonds!

"Why?"

The native didn't know. He had been hired only to kill.

Dougherty let him go. He got up. He saw the knife dull-shining nearby and placed his foot on it. He watched the native reel to his feet, arm twisted out of shape, still bent around his back. He stood with his Luger in his hand, foot on the machete, and said, "I should kill you. Not one man in one hundred would let you go after *that*, after tonight."

The boy backed away. He got his broken arm around so he could hold it against his body. Then he turned and ran reeling across the yard, through moon and shadows, with a crashing sound through the overgrown pickets of the old compound fence. Afterward it was silent, and Dougherty got his breath.

He went back to his room. He shut the door, scratched a match, and stood looking down on the three tiny blow darts, each tipped with a black syrup of poison, driven through the floor mattings into the boards in the exact place his cot would have stood had not the boy's warning and his own instinct for danger caused him to move.

The match burned out, scorching his fingers. He flipped it away. That Chinese, damn him! Why had the Chinese wanted to kill him? His hatred for Wuch'ang? He should find the Chinese and kill him. Another man might have. But Dougherty dismissed the idea, if indeed it actually tempted him. He was a newcomer, and this was Chin Tseng's town. Aye, you walk lightly in the other man's town. Dougherty knew that much. Dougherty recognized the percentages. He had learned something of the fine art of staying alive.

The room seemed oppressive. He packed as quickly as he could and walked to the wharf, his size and his white clothing making him feel conspicuous, an excellent target. It gave him a bad feeling. He wanted to run, expecting every shadow to come to life with a bullet, a knife, a deadly blow-gun dart.

The town slept. He reached the wharf, all quiet, the sea softly slapping the piles. A little motorship had come in sometime the evening before and tied to the public wharf, as if in answer to his dreams. A native was bowed over, asleep on the landing stage. He gave him some penny cash and was let aboard. He sought passage to Singapore but the best he could do was Banka Island. From there he made it on to Palembang, and caught a K.L.M. plane to Singapore. There in the familiar surroundings of the Van Elm Hotel, enjoying a sundowner on the cool terrace, he met the third Chinese.

Dr. Sung was middle-aged and too fat for his feet. He was garbed conservatively in whites that could have stood a pressing. He looked like any of the ten thousand Singapore businessmen of his race, and certainly not like the king of all Oriental racketeers which his leadership in Wuch'ang made him. The "Dr." which distinguished the ordinary family name of Sung was in recognition of his San Francisco sojourn of twenty years before when he was engaged in the Chinese medicinal herb business.

"Visiting?" asked Dr. Sung after shaking hands. He put down his bloodwood stick and seated himself. He bowed, almost closing his eyes in a smile. "You have come from San Francisco, I presume. The last time I saw you, you *were* going back, that very month, and that was two years ago."

"Your little joke!" said Dougherty tolerantly. "Well,

you are welcome to it, but I will go back." He struck the table with fist and forearm so hard the bloodwood stick jumped and almost fell to the paving. "This year, if fate serves me, I will go back."

"Ah! Then carry my regards to Grant Avenue."

"I will not go near Grant. I am sick of the garbage odors of the East. No insult intended to your race, but I am weary of it. The clean fog, sir, the cold, the sharp buildings—"

"The feel of cold fog in your face—I can quote it all from memory."

"Aye!" said Dougherty and took a deep breath as though this muggy oppression of the tropics were stifling him.

"Strange, I found the coastal climate of California rather unpleasant. I continually awoke with pains in my knees and elbows—"

"You should have doctored yourself with your own remedies." Sung looked flat-faced, smiling at Dougherty's vehemence.

"This parasite country, life feeding on death—" He stopped and with another deep breath caused his mind to swing back to the business at hand. "You have heard from Wu?" he asked abruptly.

Dr. Sung nodded.

"He told you of Van Hoog?"

"I had already heard of him," Sung said with a smile that indicated he had heard quite a lot.

"Well, have you lost your interest in money? Doesn't it intrigue you, this spectacle of an awkward Dutch boy climbing broke off a steamer, a poor bookkeeper without a guilder in his pocket, building himself one of the big fortunes of the East? And working from that coast of poverty; North Borneo, where the chief crop was mosquitoes and its harvest malaria? Hah! And all without shipping two hundred tons a year from his plantation!"

"My race," said Dr. Sung, "is famed for its interest in finances."

"Notorious is the word. The Jews of the Orient. Oh, don't mistake me. I have nothing against the Jews. The greatest people in the world, except for the Irish. When I have the minutes at my disposal I'll sometime tell you of the Jewish sweetheart I had in the port of Dar es Salaam, the daughter of an Austrian industrialist, and

how she came to be there, singing in a shilling-a-go night club, garbed in nothing much except mascara and a string of phony pearls, a story that would startle your credulity—"

"About Van Hoog—how much have you learned? *Exactly* how much?"

"Aye," said Dougherty, tearing his mind away from the Jewish beauty. Dr. Sung had ordered tea, and he waited for the Malayan boy to put it down and leave. "All I have is the mystery, a few mended bones, a healing bullet wound in my breast, and the peculiar fact that the trade in stolen diamonds has almost vanished from Borneo. I have your own associate's word for it. Chin Tseng in Tempai." Then he added, as if an afterthought of little importance, "By the way, did you know that Chin Tseng tried to kill me?"

Dr. Sung sat up in a startled manner, saying, "Chin Tseng? Ridiculous!"

Now, thought Dougherty, it is unusual for Sung to show surprise, so evidently he wants to show surprise. He said, "You have my word for it. I was talking to Chin Tseng about Van Hoog and the diamond business, and he hired some black fellow to spear me in the dark. He missed."

"*Why* would Tseng do a thing like that?" Sung asked, sitting back, watching Dougherty very closely.

"Write to him. Ask him."

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Are you certain—"

"The native told me his employer's name. I cracked his arm, and he found his tongue as instantly as he lost his use of it. But for what purpose I was to be killed—of course he would not know, so I released him."

"I will look into this."

"Aye," said Dougherty, shaking his heavy shoulders as he laughed. "You can't have your representatives killing people, just like that, without instructions from the home office."

The remark did not set well with Dr. Sung, but he drank his tea, scalding hot, without comment. "You're not in this investigation of Van Hoog alone?"

"Quite alone."

He studied him for a few seconds with his shrewd

eyes, and Dougherty sensed that the Chinese did not believe him.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" asked Sung.

"I assumed you'd be interested when a fortune like Van Hoog's was escaping your usual black-market percentage."

"We are!"

"Then, damn it, man, show it in a concrete way."

Dr. Sung took out a pocket portfolio, unfolded it, and unzippered the fat money compartment. "Would a hundred pounds be—"

"Five hundred." Dougherty had not been thinking of money, but he saw no reason to turn the stuff down when it was offered him. He took the bank notes, thrust them in his pocket, slapped the pocket flat, enjoying the feel of the money inside.

"I wish you would find out what you can about the Dutchman. Who knows, maybe we're passing up a million or two million or five?"

Sung acknowledged by showing his yellowish teeth in a smile.

"What do you know about his warehouse here in Singapore?" asked Dougherty.

"Let me see— He bought out the old Sung Yap Drydocking and Lighter Company, didn't he?"

Dougherty said yes, and that a visit to the place might prove informative.

"It will be a risk *alone*." Dr. Sung stood and remained standing for a while, nervously tapping the pavement with his bloodwood cane. "You haven't been anywhere else."

"What do you mean?"

"That snooping U.N. commission dealing with international police matters, traffics derivative of opium, of course we don't touch the stuff, but . . ."

"What made you think I'd go to them?"

"The town is crawling with Americans."

"Sir, I am no spy!"

"Of course. Of course. Well, I'll learn what I can for you," Dr. Sung said, and left.

Dr. Sung got in touch with him by telephone the next morning to say that the Sung Yap Company was from all appearances carrying on a conventional trade in sago, crude rubber, and the second-rate coffee of

Borneo. Although it was by name a Drydocking and Lighter firm, it was no longer active in those fields. Its resident manager was a Chinese from Hong Kong who signed his name P. W. Chen. Sung had learned that Chen had been engaged in the pottery clay business until supplies had been shut off by the closing of the Chinese ports. From all accounts he had a good reputation. As for the warehouse, it was their custom to close and lock it shortly after dark and not return until morning. Aside from Chen and a watchman, there were no regular employees, all the work being performed by coolie gangs recruited as they were needed. The watchman was a Malayan with a day job, so the chances were he merely turned in and slept all night. A couple of night lights would be burning, but only in the east half of the building, because only that portion of it was in use. Dr. Sung had been informed that the building could be entered by forcing one of the unused doors to the old wharf, but he advised caution. For the fact that this portion of the building was so obviously abandoned might make it doubly dangerous, as it might be in use for business of a very private nature. From what Dr. Sung had been able to learn, it was not in Van Hoog's nature to let any piece of property deteriorate and become a loss.

Chapter Nine

He paid off the ricksha boy and stood with an umbrella rolled under one arm, listening while the wheels faded away across the broken pavement. It was quiet then, with none of the nearby wharfs in operation. The area was poorly lighted. Only a few of the warehouses which stood in solid ranks back from the harbor had been painted or repaired during recent years, and what poor light came from the high post lights was quickly absorbed by the prevailing rust and gray dilapidation. Here and there a passageway ran back among the buildings, each of them deep canyons of blackness.

Well, blackness suited his purpose. He hefted the umbrella, rolled to conceal the solid weight of a wrecking bar and a three-cell electric torch. He walked, openly, taking his own good time, his manner one of a person about a habitual piece of business, as if accustomed to coming down there to the native wharfs at that late hour.

Actually the area was not deserted at all, merely quiet, sleeping. A driver was asleep in his lorry; on the junks and tramps and sailing prahus that used the docks, crews were asleep on deck; coolies were asleep on grass mats against the buildings. He walked quietly as if fearing to disturb them. He passed from paving to planks that sounded hollow beneath his feet. He could hear the ringing sound of water slapping against pilings below. Everything had a stamp of age. Night coolness sharpened the odors, giving the sea a vinegar fragrance. His nerves were taut, and as often happened to him, he had a sensation of being watched, but not strong, not as it had been when approaching that guest house in Tempai. It was more as if the sleeping coolies would open their eyes on him after he had gone by.

From somewhere came the muffled dissonant twanging of Chinese instruments. He passed a low, dark, dilapidated building. Its door was open and he caught the acrid warmth of opium. No light, no sound, but the smokers were there, somewhere, down some zig-zag pass-

ageway, stretched out on unyielding shelves of boards having their "three-pipe-a-dolla." And that under the nose of the commission of inquiry for the U.N. in the Far East!

He passed on, beneath the black shadow of some metal awnings. The next building was the Sung Yap warehouse. He stopped and watched.

It was a large, low building of several gables, one section added to the others as business grew during those great days before the war, since fallen into a state of erosion like everything else of the area, blended by time into a single, grayish unit. A couple of covered wharfs had been built out into the bay. Only the closer of the two showed signs of recent use. A small motorship was tied there, a single light in her forecastle, but no one in sight, not even the customary native asleep by her landing stage. Everything was right, everything was as he had wanted it. He did not even have that feeling of a trap about to be sprung.

Still he waited awhile. An old man, a coolie, came past talking to himself, passing so close to him in the shadow that Dougherty could have reached and touched him. Then he was gone, taken in by the night.

Dougherty went on, straight past the warehouse office, only glancing in as a man ordinarily would. There was a dim light on. He had a glimpse through unwashed, barred windows of a brownish, cluttered interior, a desk, some filing cabinets. He kept walking. He passed between the wharfs and the warehouse. There a plank walk turned and led back between the Sung Yap warehouse and that of another concern next to it. It was so dark there, beneath the projecting pagoda-like eaves, that he had to grope ahead of him for the hand-rail, and each change of level, each broken plank, gave him the uncomfortable sensation of stepping into a pitfall.

He found a short ramp, climbed it, and the walk was terminated by a squarish landing large enough for hand trucks to be turned on.

And there were the doors which Dr. Sung's unusually proficient investigators had informed him of.

Aye, he thought, and now if only they are equally correct about this half of the building being out of use!

The doors were the common double type, suspended

by wheels on an overhead track. He tried them. They were fastened on the inside.

He took the bar from its umbrella wrapping and fitted it into the opening between the doors and pried. With a snap and thud something gave way, perhaps the screws half rotted from the wood, for it was easy, easier than he expected.

He slid one of the doors, trying to do it very gently and cursing the noise it made in gliding along the old track, until there was room for him to slide his body through. He hesitated, suddenly hit by the feeling that someone awaited him in the dark.

He could see nothing. The air that came to him was dead, as if for years undisturbed, like the air from a tomb. It smelled of rotting sacks and the fermenting piles that supported the floor. He listened for half a minute, recovered from his momentary lack of resolution, put the bar away, took out the electric torch, felt reassuringly of the Luger in his pocket, and stepped inside.

There, no longer silhouetted by any light that might come through the opening, he said, "Hello!"

He spoke quietly, but his voice raised echoes which came back with unexpected force, startling him. He was shaky for a second; then he laughed at himself, turned on the torch, and swung its beam in a half circle.

The warehouse stretched out deep and far in two directions, a black-shadowed infinity filled with the straight forest of pillars that supported the roof. The pillars reflected light, rendering his eyes unable to explore the deeper limits of the building. Opposite him was the central partition of the warehouse, what once had been an outer wall, for the paint remnants of some Chinese advertising signs still remained. The room contained only some lumber, long webbed over and dusty, and a heap of rat-chewed sago baskets.

A second set of doors separated the room from the one next to it. He switched off the light and walked to them half expecting to find them barred, but they moved to his touch.

He was now in the main section of the warehouse. It was dimly lighted by electric bulbs on drop cords, one at each end. For some reason it did not bother him to enter this room as it had the other; he merely took his time, watching and listening for a startled movement

of the watchman. There was none. Not a sound, not a tremble of the floor, nothing. He closed the door.

He was sweating. He paused to dry his face with a handkerchief. Some bags of coffee beans were stacked against one wall, and pearl sago in bags and baskets stood on cribworks of bamboo to keep it from drawing moisture from the floor. Both coffee and sago had accumulated cobwebs and dust, indicating that it might represent the undisposed portion of last season's crop.

He walked quietly, keeping in the shadow, and covered the length of the room. A sense of frustration seized him. He had expected something, he did not know what, a den of pirates, perhaps, a smuggler's hideout, anything but this, a half-empty warehouse, exactly the thing it looked to be.

He turned and started back. An odor had touched his nostrils. It was a musty, old-dung odor, a barnlike odor. He knew of only one thing in the world with such a smell—it was the odor of crude opium.

Discovery made the hair of his neck tingle. Restraining the impulse to hurry, he traced it down, moving bags and baskets, and found it, a little heap of brown-black tarlike balls, each large as a man's two fists, stored in a basket beneath a thin covering of pearl sago.

He counted fourteen of them. He lifted one, a heavy, solid mass, the result of infinite labor, the scratching and dripping and scraping of thousands of poppy pods. It was oily and smooth, and that indicated it was Indian in origin, not Arabian which was rough and granular, or that of Iran which came in long sticks. Indian, or perhaps Siamese. He made a quick estimate of weight, and guessed that the basket contained 55 pounds. At the illegal wholesale price of $345, American, that would mean the cache was worth in the neighborhood of $5000. Five thousand was not an amount to be taken lightly, but scarcely on the scale of Van Hoog's fortune. He suspected that he had located only a small portion of the cache.

He forced one of the opium balls in the side pocket of his coat, placed the rest as he had found them, covered them with sago, looked around to make certain that nothing else had been disturbed, then, walking with long, quiet strides he retraced his course to the door.

The door handle refused to work. He used his strength,

trying to force the handle around. He looked down and saw that a brass padlock had been snapped through the loops of a bolting mechanism.

Alarm hit him with explosive force. He wheeled and dived, going to one knee, grabbing the Luger, snapping the safety off, expecting ambush.

He found cover against the sago baskets that filled the mid-portion of the room. With their protection at his back, he turned to look around. Then he saw a man face down on the floor, close beneath one of the electric lamps, about thirty steps away. A dead man, he thought.

Dougherty stayed where he was, the Luger ready, waiting for trouble. He had no idea who the man was or how he had got there. He remained where he was, getting his excitement down, making his mind function, trying to reason out what had happened.

There had been no sound of a struggle. He had heard no sound of a man falling. He was certain that the man had not been lying there when he first entered the room. His being there was nightmarish and unreasonable, yet there he was.

He raised himself very carefully for another look between the sago baskets. The man was face down and very still. He was a small man, in floppy dungarees and a blue shirt, the kind coolies favor. A Chinese, he thought. A dagger lay on the floor midway between his outstretched hands and the door which Dougherty had found padlocked. It was a Malay dagger with a foot-long, wavy blade of the type generally referred to as a *kris*. It lay where he might have dropped it in sprawling forward.

Dougherty felt sick and short of breath. The air of the room pressed on him. The fear, more than that, the knowledge that the man's killer was watching him, became unbearable.

"Hello!" His voice echoed back from the long room. "Where are you? Damn you, where are you?"

He did not expect an answer, and it hit him hard when one came, and came from the darkness so close.

"Dougherty?" The voice sounded calm and polite.

He could not see him. He faced the sound of the voice with the Luger clenched hard and said, "Where are you?"

"Here. Please put the gun away."

Dougherty still clutched it, unable for the moment to move.

The man said, "Please, the danger is past."

Of course, the man could already have killed him. Dougherty broke his trancelike rigidity and put the gun back in its holster.

"Aye," he said, his voice sounding hoarse and tired. "Aye, the danger is past. Where are you? What is this?"

The Chinese stepped from the shadow, walked toward him, a medium-tall, lean, tight-faced man of thirty or so, dressed in an ordinary dark suit. Dougherty had never seen him before.

"Who sent you, Dr. Sung?"

"Oh, yes!" he said with surprised deference. "You knew?"

"I know Dr. Sung."

"He instructed me to give you every possible assistance."

Dougherty still had not completely recovered. He was only now realizing how frightened he had been. He could not trust himself to stand alone. He stood holding to the sago and said, "Aye, Dr. Sung, always, everything, in the squeeze of his hand. Damn him!" Then, jerking his head at the dead man. "The watchman?"

"Yes."

"A shame. Dead, only doing his job."

The Chinese said with a slight smile, "To do his job he had only to ring the automatic alarm."

"Eh?"

He pointed it out, a wire run along the side of the room.

"What happened?" Dougherty asked.

"As were my instructions, I followed you. When I came through the door you were already halfway across the room. The door was open, I stepped in, and there he was with a knife, the *kris,* tiptoeing after you. I thought I would have to kill him with the gun. I was very sorry. So much noise, so much disturbance. But he did not follow. He returned, padlocked the door, and here," the Chinese went back and marked an exact spot with his toe, "he waited, ready for you to turn from the door."

Dougherty restrained a shudder and crossed and touched the *kris* with his toe. "And you killed him!" He turned, saying. "For my life, many thanks!"

The Chinese bowed slightly.

"Your name?"

"Hip Ying."

"I will commend you to your employer."

The *kris*, Dougherty noticed, lay a good ten feet from the man's outflung hands. It would have fallen like that if the man had fallen, but in falling it would have made a sound, a loud sound, and in falling the man would have made his sound, too. But there had been nothing.

"Deft!" said Dougherty to the Chinese. "You know your job. Expert. I *will* commend you highly to your employer!"

Chapter Ten

IT WAS LATE, very late, when Dougherty climbed the stairs to Dr. Sung's office, a dingy suite of rooms in the Ah Hong Transport Company building, but he was certain that Sung would be waiting for him. He was.

"Well," said Dr. Sung, smiling, his eyes almost shut, "I see by your manner that you found something."

"Aye, and with the help of your man, I brought it here. Hip Ying—he saved my life, and left a corpse there to remember us by."

Dr. Sung showed only a slight interest. It was almost as though he had known. He watched as Dougherty got the ball of crude opium from his pocket. He picked it up, balanced it in his womanish, tapered fingers and turned it all around in the light, sniffing it and examining its color and texture.

"Indian," said Dougherty.

"No."

"What then?"

"The Islands."

"Ridiculous, sir. This is none of your Island hard cake. This is Indian, or Persian perhaps. I have handled enough crude opium to know."

"Island," repeated Dr. Sung and laid it to one side. "Yes, this is from the Islands, the new cultivation, Indian seed, the Indian method. I'll wager that cake of opium came from your own Borneo."

Dougherty gave him a long look, wondering if he was really serious. Deciding he was, he said, "I would not, sir, pay the sum of one hundred thousand dollars for all the opium produced on the Island of Borneo."

"Perhaps that is why you are still here, in the East, borrowing money from Wuch'ang, instead of back in San Francisco with your fortune already made, living at the Mark, eating at fine restaurants, feeling that cold fog in your face. You are brave, Dougherty. You have intelligence of a kind. You reason well, up to a certain point, but you make up your mind to a thing and then it becomes a closed door, you bend all facts to the shape

of your conclusion. For all your years here, you have never come to understand that few things in the East are what they seem. Borneo, I believe, is the great new opium producer of the world. You have been living there all the while and it takes me, in Singapore, to tell you. But opium in Borneo is nothing new. It was a great producer once before, in the centuries before the Moslem conquest. It is a great turn of the cycle." He tapped the opium. "Tonight you have found the key to a very great mystery. Yet, my dear Dougherty, there you stand with your mind fortified against it. Why? I suppose because you were dreaming of diamonds."

"I have made up my mind against nothing and I have not been dreaming of diamonds."

Dr. Sung said, "I would be glad to have this drug traffic stamped out."

"Aye?" said Dougherty, sensing a proposition.

"You know, we never deal in this stuff, only through the monopoly. I dare say you might collect a reward from the U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Narcotic Drugs, but it would be small. I believe Wuch'ang could pay you much more."

"For this?" he said, pointing to the opium ball resting on the table.

"Oh, no! For what it might lead to. If you could prove that Van Hoog is indeed the kingpin of the opium trade. If you could stamp out the main trade itself." He saw Dougherty's incredulity and explained, "Look at our position. We are deep in the money market. What is the basis of all money, what is the ultimate standard of value the world over? Gold and the American dollar. How do you get American dollars? Well, I'll tell you how *Van Hoog* has obtained American dollars and in such a quantity he has challenged our leadership in the money markets. With that—that Borneo opium."

"You knew all the time what I'd find."

"I guessed." He sat drumming the table with his tapered fingers, studying Dougherty's face. "Just how badly do you want to return to San Francisco, in style, in a manner befitting your tastes?"

Dougherty struck the table so hard that everything on it jumped, and Dr. Sung had to grab a little jade bell to keep it from falling to the floor. "I'm going back. This year, I'm going back. Not steerage, sir. Not on some

stinking copra boat, but in style, as you say, with money, in a manner befitting a man of my tastes."

"Good. Excellent." Dr. Sung seemed to be genuinely pleased. He was a man who had Dougherty's good at heart. "You have made a fine start already. You know your man, you have the key to his fortune here, in this—this ball of opium. So now learn the rest: where he gets it, the geography, the exact process of trade, to whom he sells it. All this documented. Do you have that clear, Dougherty, it must be documented, down in black and white, so it may be laid in front of the Commission. They won't stir from their chairs, you know, and they're lawyers, all of them, so it has to be documented. Then we will break the back of the international dope market, and Wuch'ang will be rid of a troublesome competitor."

"And I?"

"You, my friend, will be richer to the tune of one hundred thousand American dollars."

"From you?"

Dr. Sung said, drawing the words out with emphasis, "I will pay you the sum of one hundred thousand, American."

"Well!" cried Dougherty, standing very tall beneath the low ceiling. "The satisfaction of stamping out this malignant traffic is worth more than all the money in the world, but for all that it would be fine to return to my homeland in a manner befitting a man of my refinement!"

Dr. Sung stopped him as he went toward the door. "Wait! You're not attempting this alone?"

"I haven't thought it all through yet."

"Who is in this with you?"

"No one."

Sung watched him go, his face blank in its flat, Chinese manner, not believing him, not trusting him, for Dr. Sung trusted no man.

"Damn him," whispered Dougherty as he let his heavy form down the stairs. "Damn his sleek, Buddhist soul!"

Dougherty stayed on in Singapore a few days, investing in the pleasures of the city, spending time at theatres and night clubs, enjoying food prepared without the ubiquitous durian oil of the Islands. He felt only slight apprehension concerning the death of the watchman at

Sung Yap. He watched the public press for a report of the murder, but not a word was printed.

After a week of paying Singapore's fabulous prices, however, he noticed a change in the thickness of his pocketbook, and began to consider Dr. Sung's proposition, and to give some hard thought to the best procedure. Now again his mind returned to the girl. Her assistance in proving Van Hoog's guilt in the drug traffic might make a difficult task very simple. The fact that she hated him with sufficient intensity to try to kill him was not necessarily an insurmountable barrier to an agreement between them. He felt that an offer of an opportunity to share in one hundred thousand American dollars might place them on a new plane of understanding.

Now to find her.

He thought it probable that her departure from Photang had been accomplished with the help of Captain Jaske. Jaske's ship, the Sally Scott, was owned chiefly by C. W. Wang of Manila, so Dougherty cabled there for her itinerary. The answer came back twenty-four hours later—she was making for Khota Bharu for a cargo of rubber.

Khota was only a short distance up the coast, and a small plane was able to set him down there that very afternoon. He had seen the Sally at anchor while his pilot was circling, waiting for use of one of the two runways, and shortly after dark he located Jaske himself in the dining room of a small, second-rate hotel, the Cotswold, where he was sitting at a table with two other ship captains as down at the heel as himself.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Jaske said, popping to his feet, his mouth full and his Adam's apple bobbing up and down as he talked. "Look who's 'ere but the Frisco 'imself, my dear old friend I'd given up for dead!"

They shook hands, and Jaske introduced him around. Later, when the others had gone, Dougherty explained as much of his present business as he thought it expedient for Jaske to know.

"And you want to give her a second whirl!" Jaske said, watching him with his foxy eyes. "Now, maybe I could find her and maybe I couldn't. I feel sort of fatherly to her, you know, Frisco, and I wouldn't want her coming to no harm."

"A third share," said Dougherty.

"And 'ow much is that?"

"Ten thousand American."

"Well, now!" said Jaske, impressed. "I've seen the day when the gun business was good in Java a man could turn that every week with practically no risk in some of those jungle harbors, but times ain't what they used to be. No, they ain't, and ten thousand to me right today is all the money in the world. You mean ten thousand just for leading you to the girl?"

"Ten thousand when the job is finished."

Jaske soured a little, but he did not turn it down. "Ten thousand lousy bucks for risking my ship, and risking my hide. And all the expense. Yes, you're damn right, maybe I do only hire the yellow men, but there's a staggerin' expense to running a ship. And ten thousand!" He laughed bitterly, twisting his mouth around to one side, showing his betel-browned teeth. "Never trust a Yank, I say. Ten thousand, a third share, 'e says! I'll wager it's not a third share. I'll wager you're getting *fifty* thousand if only the truth was known."

There was no cargo for Jaske at Khota Bharu, but at Singapore he picked up some vats and canning equipment of a dismantled brewery which was being transferred by its Chinese owners to Ban Don, and from there it could be explained as reasonable that they would go on to Bangkok for a cargo of rice.

And so one night Dougherty quietly entered the American Club, a glittering, deeply-upholstered little night club, where Jaske informed him that Nana was earning her living as an entertainer.

He had deliberately come early. He sat at a tiny, triangular table, half hidden in a red-padded niche in the wall. The light was amber and indirect, and it was a-while, after the bright electric signs of the street, before his eyes grew accustomed to it. He ordered bourbon and seltzer. A dark young man with a Louisiana accent commenced playing a toy-size piano and singing a number of Stateside hits, none of them more recent than the unusually appropriate "Slow Boat to China."

It was still early, and Dougherty was on his fourth drink, although he nursed them slowly, before the place commenced to fill up.

Some of the customers were indeed American, business-

men who had flocked to that last outpost of free trade in the Orient, ship's officers, members of the United States military mission, but most present were Chinese, the glittering rich Chinese speaking the sharp accents of Shanghai rather than the more pleasing inflection of the South, members of industrial and mercantile families who had fled with their riches before the Red conquest—Bangkok, like Hong Kong, was full of them.

He ordered one more drink and waited as the babble grew. He could no longer hear the words of the singer and a blue layer of cigarette smoke lay beneath the ceiling. Then the piano was wheeled off the little, dollar-size stage, and a young Polynesian came on, spun a guitar in the air, caught it, smiled with a flash of white teeth, and commenced to play. He was very handsome. He was garbed in a brilliant batik lava cloth. His body had attained that remarkable degree of perfection which comes from a life spent as much in the sea as out of it. His smooth brown skin shone from oil and resembled copper. He played with assurance and charm, a genuine native tune, and after a time, very casually, a girl moved from among the drapes into the shifting colors of a spotlight.

Even expecting her, it was a shock, and Dougherty tensed forward. The girl was Nana.

He had forgotten she was so lovely. She had the poise and the sleek strength of a leopard. She wore a costume of sheer silk, a combination Kemban and sarong, the Kemban a tight twist of silk around her breasts, the sarong flowing light as gossamer to the floor, floating as she moved, wrapping around her naked feet as she spun slowly to the rhythm of the guitar. The material was brown like her body, and with the spotlight also in hues of tan, pink-amber, and brown the material seemed not to exist, to be only a mist of changing intensity through which her body was visible, uncertain, drifting, like viewing a naked swimmer through a brownish, greenish sea.

She had started slowly, with movements of her feet and her shoulders. She was extremely graceful. She seemed to dance for her own amusement, unconscious of the eyes that followed her. She danced with her head up, smiling, but scornful of applause or favor or anything that the club's chrome-plated patrons could confer.

She did an adaptation of some Borneo coastal dance, a dance of Malayan or Polynesian origin. The melody, then changing subtly, became reminiscent of the native Hawaiian.

Now, with a waltzlike change of tempo, the guitarist commenced to sing. He paused, and without stopping her dance, she responded. She did not have a good singing voice, it was almost a monotone, but there was something compelling about it. Her voice was dulcet and it did something to you, it stirred you deeply, arousing some half-forgotten urge, like moonlight and warm winds and the spicy odor of ylang-ylang, like regrets and a half-forgotten love. A peculiar spell was woven by guitar and voices and the veiled naked beauty of the dancer. But the mood kept changing. The time for singing was over. she danced rapidly, leading rather than following the guitar, until suddenly, with a toss of her head, a swing of her long hair, a wild sway of her supple body, it was over. She spun to leave, and for the first time actually looked at her audience. And her eyes came to rest on Dougherty.

Dougherty stood. He bowed and motioned to the empty chair beside him. She tore her eyes away from him and ran off the stage, leaving the drapes swinging behind her.

She did not return even to acknowledge prolonged applause, and finally a Dixieland band set up their chairs and commenced beating out "Cornet Chop Suey."

Dougherty waited with increasing concern. He cursed himself for coming so openly; he should at least have taken a more remote table—he was a fool to let her see him. Already she might be packing her things, perhaps riding a cab to the airport. He stood up with money to pay his bill and was looking for a waiter whom he might bribe to take him to her dressing room when he heard her voice at his elbow. He spun about and saw her in a long, dark evening wrap, just sitting down in the empty chair.

He exhaled in relief. She carried a handbag, but her hand was not inside it. No gun. Aye, he thought, chuckling to himself, there is a chance for you! They sat for almost a minute without either saying the first word.

Then she took a package of cigarettes from her bag and said, "Have a Lucky." They were Old Golds.

Dougherty laughed. Somewhere she must have heard the term "have a Lucky" and thought it an Americanism for "have a smoke."

"That's a certain brand," he said, taking one. "Lucky Strike. When you offer me these, in America we say 'have an Old Gold.' It's really very simple."

"You're getting one of your lousy American cigarettes, aren't you?" she asked. "See, I picked up a lot of American talk here. I learn fast. I learn what makes Americans tick. These people, these businessmen. I talked to them. They all act like you. Anything for a dollar. How much is the price of a human being? How much?"

"You're asking me?"

"Yes, how much? How much for *me?*"

"You mean how much did I get from Van Hoog?"

"Yes."

"Believe me," said Dougherty sincerely, "at a guilder you would be too dear because you're a little more than a man can handle. And by the same token, at a million you would be cheap."

She said, just as sincerely, "I wish I had killed you."

He could not be angry with her. She was wonderful, she was beautiful. He thought she had run away from him again and now that she hadn't, now that she was willing to sit with him and talk with him, anything was all right.

"I die hard," he said.

"Didn't I hit you at all?"

He opened his shirt, showing the scar, still red and tender. She reached and touched the spot. Her fingers gave him a strange sensation. They were so very warm and smooth and soft. He felt slightly giddy. He told himself it was the whisky and the lack of real air in the place. He wanted to reach across and grab her by her shoulders, and pull her to him. But he did nothing that would attract attention.

She said, "You have a nerve coming here! What made you think I wouldn't shoot you again?"

"Calculated risk. Anyway, I like my women with spirit."

"Don't talk like a fool. Why, why?"

"You wouldn't kill me without satisfying your curiosity, why I had come."

She laughed.

He went on, "Let me ask you a question—why are you here, showing your body and singing your song before these, these chrome-plated Shanghai tramps? Look at them, made up like mummies dug up from a tomb! Digging in their bags and tossing money at you! I know why you're here, and it hasn't a thing to do with art or the theatre. You're here because Jaske dropped you on the beach, broke, and you'd like to get the hell out of the country, to Manila, to London, to San Francisco, to Hollywood. You need a quick buck. Have you learned *that* Americanism dancing your seven veils in this upholstered sewer? You need a quick buck, and I came because I'm the lad who can get it for you."

She sat with the cigarette dangling in her lips and watched him without saying a word.

He said, "There are several reasons why I came. I won't go into it. Not here. After all, even the greatest philosopher is unable to find all the tangled skeins of impulses that guide our most simple act, such as coming in out of the rain. So who can say why I followed you? But I am here. And my being here can mean something very real to you in the way of dollars. You see, I am back to talking like an American."

"Lies!"

"If you believed that you wouldn't be sitting here."

She laughed, showing derision, but not enough to discourage him from going on.

"How many dollars?" she asked.

"Who knows? We start with ten thousand—for you. Ten for you, ten for me, and ten for Jaske."

"And where do we end?"

"A million, who knows? But we can't talk here." He stood and laid his hand on her shoulder. It was wonderfully smooth and round, and strong under the wrap she wore. "My dear, come, we have a great many things to tell each other."

It was nearing dawn when Dougherty left her at her rooms. It was cool now, with a breeze from the Chao pah, the great river that sliced Bangkok down the middle, its slums on one side, its temples and palaces on the other. He took a deep breath and stood with his topee off under stars just commencing to fade. The city was quiet with only an occasional blast of a claxon, or the tinkle of a

rick bell, but the klongs were busy as sampans brought their heaps of produce down from the hinterland for the day's trade. He felt at peace with himself, confident that the first great hurdle had been cleared, that Van Hoog was almost in his grasp now that the girl had joined him.

They would go to North Borneo: Jaske could anchor unseen in one of the thousand deep lagoons, Nana could return to the plantation and with any kind of luck, in a single hour, secure the proof of Van Hoog's operations from Amdah and his strongbox. She even knew the combination, the old one, but a gun on Amdah would work as well. Dougherty, with a sub-machine gun, would wait for her at one of the gates. It would be a different proposition capturing him with a gun in his hands, a Thompson or a Bren if he could recruit a dependable native to help him. And once aboard the Sally Scott—He laughed to himself, saying, "Aye, his own game. Force with force. He'll sing another tune, that Dutchman, when I've torn his guts out with bullet lead."

He awakened his ricksha boy and rode along tree-bowered pavements to the garden of the Mariner's Club, where he had secured a room. He climbed the long, easy ramp and unlocked his door. When he turned on the light there was Hip Ying waiting for him.

It gave Dougherty a bad start, and his hand went automatically toward his gun pocket, but he stopped and said, "You could get killed that way sometime."

Hip Ying smiled, showing his yellowish teeth, bobbed his head, and said, "My employer, he like very much you come out alive. Great friends, all San Francisco men, my employer."

"Aye, great friends! He doesn't trust me, does he? Nor does he trust you, my friend, nor does he trust anyone. He thinks that one of us will counter the other. Or perhaps we will both be loyal. And that would be fine. But what would prevent both of us *double-crossing* him, eh? What indeed?"

"I don't understand." Ying said, frozen-faced.

"A jest, only a jest. How the devil did you follow me here?"

"V'y easy. Bribe engine man on ship, send cable first port, follow like that."

"Chop-chop!"

"Sure."

The man had saved his life in Singapore, but one word from Dr. Sung and it would be the other way around, and Ying would kill him. It gave Dougherty an unpleasant feeling, remembering Ying's flawless proficiency in killing the watchman, a knife just so, between the ribs, and not a sound, not a whisper, all so silent one could hear the ringing lap-lap of waves under the warehouse.

"How far are you following me?" he asked, trying to shake the memory off.

"All the way."

"Well, now!" Dougherty gave it some thought. Hip Ying might be a useful man to have along. "Ever handle a machine gun?" Hip Ying nodded. "Sub-machine?" He nodded again, and Dougherty muttered, "Useful? Aye, indeed!"

Hip Ying said, grinning very hard, "Dr. Sung say he want get you back to San Francisco all in good shape. V'y good shape to San Francisco, you like?"

"Why lad, I like it very much. Yes, yes—very much indeed!"

Chapter Eleven

IT WAS NIGHT, and from the sea Borneo was solid black with a thin line of silver where the waves met the sand. It was a low coast, swampy, its tidal flats reaching deep inland. Across the flats, in water or land low-rising out of it, was jungle, a tangle of solid green, impregnable, thick sponge of living matter. Beyond, if one looked closely, he could get an impression of rising forest, and higher slopes hidden by mist that had the appearance of the sky itself, and then higher, remote, apparently suspended independent of the earth's gravity, were the great peaks, volcanic cones, a rocky fastness.

"Opium country?" Jaske asked, seeing Dougherty at the rail. He walked up, dragging his tennis shoes to keep them from falling off, "Opium country be damned! Gold country, maybe. Diamond, maybe. Head-hunter country you're damned right, but opium country, *no*."

Dougherty said, "We won't have head-hunters to worry about, not with the government lending heads like books from a library."

Dougherty was referring to the present British policy of keeping on hand a store of human heads which could be loaned out for religious mumbo-jumbo, making the hunting of fresh heads unnecessary.

"I know of *one* head I'd like to give 'em. That Dutchman's. I'd feel a hell of a lot better if they 'ad that head right now."

"*Mak Gunong*," said Dougherty, pointing to the highest of the peaks. Even at night a thin cloud of volcanic vapor could be seen drifting from the irregular pit of its crater.

"I need no damn piano-playing Yankee to tell me navigation. We'll make your lagoon all right. There's a little matter of the tide to think about, m'lad. These lagoons all tie with a creek or river someplace, and they got a bit of sediment to drop when they reach the sea. I don't care about getting my ship's belly stuck in a mudbar under any circumstance, and not 'ere with that mad gorilla, Van Hoog, waiting to sink his hooks into

us. So with your patience I'm waiting for the tide." Jaske burped by way of emphasis and went slap-slapping back along the deck.

"You'd better take milk of magnesia for that," Dougherty said. He suspected Jaske had an ulcer, and the tension of the last two days was making it kick up on him.

"Magnesia be damned!"

"It will do you more good than that betel you've been burning your gullet with," Dougherty said.

He saw Nana then and walked forward to speak to her. "We're an hour or two early, so there's nothing to do but stand by and wait for the tide. We'll be in well before dawn."

She said, "I heard you talking about opium."

"Yes. Opium country," he said, waving at the cloud-concealed highlands. "It would be a good deal like that opium country between Siam and Burma, I dare say, only these peaks are higher."

"No."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't believe it's an opium country."

"Oh, come now, you've been listening to Jaske again."

"I mean it. By the way, how did you come to discover the stuff that night in Singapore?"

"I told you, I searched the warehouse—"

"But what led you to it?"

"Its odor."

"It *has* a strong odor, doesn't it?"

"Well, that depends."

"A storehouse of it, though. Say, a ton of it."

"Well, yes. A ton of it, fresh from working, would probably smell to high heaven."

"You're wrong, you see. There was never anything like that at the plantation. Not from the guarded storehouse, anyway."

Dougherty, with a trace of annoyance, said, "Well, let's hear you explain his mysterious source of wealth. Girl, I have an unusually competent group of men at my back. Believe me, they have assured me it was opium. All we need is the proof, accounts, documents, the thing we will find in that strongbox of his."

"You won't find a pipeful of opium in Tengah!"

He laughed at her. He took hold of her shoulders. He

liked to do that, he liked the feel of her youth in his hands. He turned her to face him. She was dressed in anticipation of a trip ashore in a shirt, shorts that reached to her knees, a pair of three-quarter length bush boots.

"We'll learn!" he said. "That's our purpose, to learn."

She looked up at him, perfectly calm and steady. Of them all, she had displayed the least sign of excitement or nervousness.

"Aren't you worried?" he asked.

"No."

"I've been thinking about it. I shouldn't have asked you to take such a risk."

"He's not there."

They had sent a wireless from Singapore, signing Nana's name, requesting an immediate reply, and it had gone unanswered, and so they had decided Van Hoog was gone, in the up-country, or making one of his innumerable, unexplained jaunts to one or another port in the Orient.

"He might have returned," he said.

"Good. I'll kill him, like I should have killed him in Photang."

"But you chose to kill me instead."

With a hint of a smile she said, "I should have shot you both."

He kept hold of her. She was beautiful. He was thinking of her, like Van Hoog thought of her, in silks and diamonds, on his arm, at home. With other women, pallid creatures, cutting her with their jealous eyes.

He said, "He will live, and as long as he lives he will look for you. He will look for you in the last island of the Pacific. You must come with me, Stateside, to San Francisco. I don't think he'll follow us there."

She laughed and said, "At the American Club they all offered to take me to Hollywood and get me in the pictures."

"You have a voice and beauty and you can dance. Hollywood is not so far a dream."

"And you know, what do they call them, a producer?"

"My dear," trying to draw her close. "I wish you were serious—"

"Don't try that!" She pulled away from him, and just for a second, as he tried to stop her, he had an impression

of her supple strength. "Just because I ran away with Fawley doesn't mean I'm anybody's woman."

She left him before he had a chance to tell her that he could never imagine her being *anybody's* woman.

The Sally Scott moved half-speed along the shore, where the moon shone on little inlets and mangroves grew down into the water. Brother John climbed the stack and from that vantage point called down, "Hokay, now!" and Jaske swung the ship around, and just keeping steerageway, with the screw going bump-bump in slow vibrations, guided through an opening in the swampy shores. It was narrow and dark. The ship hung for a moment at the entrance, feeling for the mudbar, but the tide had carried them clear of it, and they slipped in safely, through taller timber, the lagoon widening out.

" 'Ow's that for the old man?" Jaske asked when he found Dougherty at his elbow. "Now what do you say of my navigating? Top 'ole, eh? Oh, old Jaske has done a bit of sailing along these shores and by the dark of the moon. Charts be damned, a fat lot of good they do you on these shifting coast lines. 'Ere, Sumatra or down along the Reef. I'm like them old-time flyers—I navigate by the seat of my pants." Then his voice hardened. "Well, I'm doing *my* bit, and with a piece of investment, too, old Sally, rusty as she is! Now you better be up to *your* bit, Frisco, and no double-o, because if you toss it into me again I'll have my blade in your liver, I will as certain as Gawd guides the British."

"You'll get your ten thousand," said Dougherty. "And maybe a bit more if things work out for us."

When Dougherty turned away, Jaske called to him. "Yank!" He lowered his voice so Brother John nearby could not hear. "You figure on killing him, don't you? You and the girl. You figure she'll kill 'im and then the two of you will just move in on the loot, ain't that the ticket?"

"Ridiculous! He's not even there."

"Maybe, and maybe no. Yank, you're not lying to me. You figure on killing 'im and just takin' over, lock, stock, and barrel."

"No, damn you, no!"

"Well, I ain't interested in the moral aspects of the case. But just mind you this—I'm a ship's captain and

you're just a couple that bought passage. I took you in good faith, and no questions asked. You're not ringing me in on your deal. You're not putting a rope around Jaske's neck, if it ever gets to the point of law and prosecution. Bear that in mind, Frisco-me-lad, and bear it well."

"And what if we do take over? Am I to understand you still only want your honest ship captain's fare?"

"I didn't say that!"

"Do you know what you've always reminded me of, Jaske? A jackal. A jackal that comes around to get his bellyful after the tigers have made the kill."

Jaske laughed dyspeptically and kept the ship moving, through broken moonlight and darkness, groping deeper and deeper into the jungle. Finally the engines stopped. He had a talk with Brother John, and the anchor rumbled down. It was almost dawn then, and the mosquitoes were bad. Dougherty saw Nana on deck and walked to her.

"Do you know the place?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"This lagoon has taken us around the bay. Actually we're *in* the bay, hidden by a ridge of silt and jungle, but there are a dozen places a canoe could find its way through. Tengah is eight or nine kilos in that direction," he said, pointing, " and the plantation is there. We'll have to avoid the fishing village. I made the mistake before. I hired a couple of paddle-boys and the others had carried the news to Van Hoog before I had reached salt water."

"I'll go to Tengah now," she said quietly. "My things are ready." She drew a small watch from her bag and looked at it, taking some time to make out the hands by the poor light. "Four-twenty. I'll be well across the bay when the sun finds us. I'll find a rick and go out to the plantation in style, if I can find a boy who isn't too afraid of the machine guns."

"My dear, I am still worried—what if he *is* there? What will you do?"

"He loves me." She added bitterly. "He killed my father to get me, so he *must* love me!"

Dougherty had never believed that, and he did not believe it now, but it was not the time for argument. He checked his watch with hers. "Ten tonight, the gate onto

the lower rice paddies. Right?" She nodded and put her watch away. "I'll wait until—"

"At ten o'clock I'll be there. I always keep my appointments."

"Aye."

Jaske was coming, shoes slapping along the deck, his dirty whites making him faintly distinguishable against the ship's gray-rusty superstructure. "She ready for the sampan?"

"Yes," she answered. "How do I look?" She stood tiptoe and turned for the men—Dougherty, Jaske, Hip Ying, and Brother John to see. "Do I look like a wandering wife come home to her husband?"

Jaske laughed and said something in a cocky manner from the side of his mouth. She descended to the sampan and seated herself amidships on an old provisions crate. The natives, Borneo salt-water boys picked up at Datoek for just this journey, exchanged a few words in their Malayan jargon and pushed off. The craft made not a sound as it slipped away through the quiet water, and in a minute it had disappeared, leaving only the wide spread of its waves.

Dougherty was sweating, his fists were clenched until they ached when he opened them. At the last moment he had had a desperate desire to stop her, but he had conquered it.

"There's a woman, sir!" he said. "Did you see her? Into the gamble of her life without so much as a tremble of an eyelash. A man's woman, sir. Mate for a viking!"

"You know what I'm thinking?" Jaske asked.

"What?"

"I'm thinking that I'd rather be in my boots right now than in that Dutchman's, because you know what she plans to do? With your help and my help, she plans to kill him."

"So you still have your teeth in that! She's had a *thousand* chances to kill him."

"Chances, yes. But never a chance to put him in the meat wagon and lay the blame on somebody else."

"Still only worried about yourself!" Dougherty said with contempt.

"No other son of a bitch," said Jaske, looking him cold in the eye, "ever worried about me, whether I lived in silk or died of the plague, and until somebody

does, someplace, sometime, I'm going to worry about me. *Just me.*"

They waited through morning and the long heat of day with scarcely a sound or the movement of a bird disturbing the quiet of the lagoon. As night settled, the sampan with its two native sailors returned to report that "missy" had gone safely ashore. A ricksha had taken her up the road to the jungle, they had had siesta and then had inquired for Van Hoog according to Dougherty's instructions, learning that he was in the back country at one of the other plantations.

"Why that's pretty!" said Jaske, changing his tune. "That means she'll have the place to 'erself."

"Aye, fate can't work at odds with a man forever."

Dougherty had procured a Bren and two Thompson sub-machine guns at Bangkok, but now he decided, because of its weight, to leave the Bren behind. The Thompsons would serve, the .45 caliber ammunition was easier to carry than the long rounds for the Bren, and augmented by pistols they would provide a potent supply of firepower out there in the dark.

"Damned if I'd leave the Bren and take those Thompsons," said Jaske. "Those .45's are all right in a hotel room, but a Bren—you can stand off a quarter mile and rip a man loose at 'is seams with *that* gun."

"There are only the two of us," Dougherty said, meaning Hip Ying and himself.

"Take Brother John, he's itching to go."

"Sure!" cried the mate with eyes wide and eager. "I fight Japs one time. I pretty good. Extra pay?"

"Aye, ten dollars a day for a fighting man."

"Good." And he confided in Dougherty all over again. "I'm saving up, get married. Pretty soon settle down. Easy money running machine gun."

Jaske had put him up to it, Dougherty was thinking. Jaske, the swine, would be glad to get him killed so there would never be an accounting for all the wages that had been entrusted to him for the post-office savings in Singapore. But Dougherty was not one to turn down a fighting man, not one as trustworthy as Brother John.

"Just what are your plans?" asked Jaske. "I 'ave a right to know."

"She'll get what is pertinent from the strongbox and meet us at the gate. Then we'll return."

"But what if she *don't* find the proof?"

"We may do a bit of exploring."

"Where?"

"I would like to locate the poppy fields."

"The up-country."

"Aye." Dougherty looked at him narrowly. "And don't leave us behind. By the gods, if you turn yellow and leave us in the lurch—"

"Don't worry," Jaske said, retreating, looking at Dougherty's hands whose strength he already knew. "You keep your claws off me. I given you no cause to get *wango!*"

"Aye, and don't! Because if I come back and find this ship gone, I'll follow you to the last harbor of the last rotten island in the Orient."

In the engine room Dougherty had put a kit together containing the things he might need—some snips in the event he had to cut barbed wire to gain entrance, a length of copper conduit, a roll of tough marline, a hand transit, a map. On his belt was his Luger and a machete, under his arm the Thompson sub-machine gun. Hip Ying had a dagger, a small Italian automatic, and the other Thompson. Brother John had the Bren, all 23 pounds of it. In addition, they all carried ammunition.

They left by sampan and were paddled through the early darkness. They had seriously overloaded the craft, making their progress slower than it would have been otherwise. The lagoon branched, and following Dougherty's directions, they took the narrower of the channels. It was dark there, with trees overhanging the water, leaving visible only a center strip of sky.

"There's a railroad somewhere close," Dougherty said, more to reassure himself than anything. "It was on the map."

It was half an hour, and he experienced some moments of anxiety before they reached it—a bridge looking like a dam because of the solid mass of vines that had grown across it.

He gave the word to stop. They did, very gently, making no move that would cause the sampan to dip with its gunwales. The bridge had been built for the old narrow-gauge line, long unused, its middle buckled, pilings rotten.

Among the pilings they located a natural tunnel through the vines where the sampan could be hidden.

"Wait for us," said Dougherty to the sailors after unloading the guns and ammunition. "Until dawn, anyhow. Then you may return to the ship, but keep coming back each night. There's a long chance we may explore the back country."

"Yes, tuan."

He trusted them. He trusted them a lot further than he did Jaske.

"I'll make it worth your while," he said. "Extra wages. Ten dollar. Do you understand, Yankee buck?" He spread the fingers of both hands. "You keep coming back!"

Carrying the heavy load of guns, using machetes, they cut their way through vines and bushes to the top of the railroad grade. There, on the ties, between the rusty old rails, remained a single-file passageway.

There was no moon, only an edge of silver above the trees. On each side the new growth was dense, sometimes reaching above their heads, but the rails guided them, and after a couple of kilometers they came into the open where the track had been cleared for use as a lorry road.

Dougherty stopped with a grunt of satisfaction and put his burden down. He glanced at his watch and took a bearing with the hand transit. He also had in his possession a cloth air-reconnaissance chart, but it was too dark to read it, and it was unnecessary, anyway. Nana had given him exact directions, she had pinpointed this spot where the lorry road joined the tracks, and a course S 30 E would take him to the lower paddies. Once there, it would be a simple matter of following the edging paths to the gate. He still had an hour and fifteen minutes before the rendezvous.

Turning, he asked, "Are you both ready?"

Hip Ying watched him with blank silence. Brother John grinned, and shook the Bren at shoulder level.

"Sure, me betcha!"

"Not against your religion?"

"War plenty chaplains, very good, I think. Chaplain say shoot hell out of 'em."

"Don't you need a hand with that Bren?"

The big native made a negative sign with much

violence, apparently fearing be might be divested of his king of machine guns and the prestige that its possession lent to him.

"Well, the cartridges anyhow. You'll kill yourself under that load. All those 303's!"

"No. The Lord is my shepherd, he help me carry my burdens. Shoot hell out of communists, enemy my religion." Somehow he had gained the idea that Van Hoog and his cohorts formed the bulwark of Island communism. "Cartridges, 303's, shoot 'em all up, kill dirty Red bastards, carry back plenty light."

"Good boy!" said Dougherty. "Strong boy!"

Aye, Dougherty was thinking, there was no strength on earth like the strength of the Lord, and well might he use some of it in the hours ahead.

Chapter Twelve

THEY WALKED THROUGH the bright light of the moon and into shadow again, following the lorry road. The road turned off in a rounding direction that would eventually lead to the main gate of the compound, but this was not in his plans, so he took a side path, and another, and another, up the successive flat steps of the paddies. Among palms, native houses thrust their palm-thatched gables into silhouette against moonlit clouds. There were sounds of people, voices, and the dissonant sad melody of a man singing to the accompaniment of a native guitar.

"Keep on steadily, steadily," Dougherty kept whispering. A light shone ahead, then others—floodlights placed at two or three-hundred-foot intervals along the compound.

A dog barked. The dog ran up and followed them, barking. Brother John said something, and his voice quieted the dog. No one investigated. The dog left. The guitar still played, the man sang. Right and left, through the palms, were more houses, the huts of natives employed on the plantation.

Then the shadow of the palms ended and the compound was just ahead. Dougherty called a halt.

It was only twenty paces to the wall but an impossible twenty paces, the ground smooth-cleared down to the short grass blades, and guards keeping up their slow prowl.

Dougherty put down his pack and took out the piece of conduit, a heavy, twisted wire about four feet in length. He straightened it in the middle. One end had been bent into a hook, a loop had been fashioned in the other. Through the loop he passed the marline, a linen cord, very strong, made hard by tar. He strung the cord out, paying out enough to reach the A-C electric line that ran along the compound wall, supplying power to the post lights. That done to his satisfaction, he spent a few minutes studying the line itself. It was dark with only a little reflected glow from the lights but

he could tell by the shine where the line was wanting in insulation. Everything was as he had pictured it.

He accustomed himself to the pacing rhythm of the guards, then, waiting for his best chance, he stepped out and tossed the conduit high and far, letting it pick up the marline. It dropped over the line; he let the conduit stop swinging. Its swinging caused a jiggling of the light. He had not counted on that. He had to keep working. He pulled the line until the hook of the conduit caught hold of the far wire, then he walked along, bringing the thing with him by a series of jerks, hunting for one of the bare spots on the wire, and then *pft!* with a flash of white the wires shorted, and next instant all the compound was dark except for a cluster of lights in the direction of the big house.

He pulled hard then, using all his strength, trying to free the wire hook. Instead the marline broke, but a snap-back of the power line sent the heavy wire hook flying away into the darkness of the compound.

"Now!" said Dougherty. "Quickly!"

They moved across and found the deep shadow of the gate. It was barred, as they expected, laced by barbed wire, long unused.

Dougherty used wire cutters to remove the lower barbed strands and a pinch bar to open the gate. The gate gave way with a screech and a thud, but natives were shouting to one another about the lights, and it went unnoticed.

"They will know!" Brother John was whispering. "They will know when they see that wire burned off."

"The bats are always shorting these lines out."

"A bat across that span?"

"Snake, then."

The three of them crowded close together in the gate niche. A guardsman ran past, so close they could have reached out with a gun barrel and touched him. A set of headlamps came on, a lorry came grinding down from one of the sheds, a spotlight started swinging around to find the trouble. An Arab in the truck and another on the ground shouted to one another. The one on the ground said that a wire had burned off, and the one in the truck dug around in a box of gear, tossing out several items, one of which was a set of electrician's climbing irons. His companion put on the irons, mounted

a pole, and in ten minutes the lights were on again. They evidently found nothing suspicious in the occurrence. The truck went grinding back across the compound. Dougherty and his companions were now inside, forming a tight group with the two Tommy guns ready and the Bren down on its rest on the ground.

It grew quiet, and gradually the sounds from far off became distinguishable—the guitar and the sad native voice, a dog barking, the whisper of barefoot sentries passing and repassing outside. There were voices somewhere in the direction of the big house whose broad gables were visible through the trees.

Dougherty kept tab on his watch. It was still half an hour. Time seemed to go very slowly. He kept imagining the shape of a woman coming toward them through the trees, but each time it was his imagination. Then it was ten o'clock, and five after, and time, instead of dragging, seemed to race away from him as he experienced a mounting apprehension.

He felt ill and sweaty. He knew now that he had been a fool, that she had gone to the plantation facing an impossible risk, that Van Hoog was probably there, or if not, then his servants, and that Hindu bookkeeper, Amdah, to hold her prisoner.

He stood up suddenly with the Thompson gun in the bend of his arm and said, "Wait for me." He had a suspicion that the Chinese would follow and spun on him, "Yes, damn you, wait for me. Two of us will only double the risk. Wait for me here and be ready to fire, but be careful who you fire at!"

Hip Ying had been halfway to his feet, now, slowly, he relaxed and crouched down again. He did not say a word.

"How long?" asked Brother John.

"I don't know."

He left his Luger. One gun was sufficient. One gun and a machete. Now that he had decided he felt another apprehension—he feared he was not giving her time enough. Half an hour was not long. Any trifling thing could have delayed her half an hour. But he had declared himself, so, moving slowly, he crossed the compound.

He concentrated, recalling the details of the ground from his other visit. His training as an engineer stood him well, the various buildings, groves, and walls forming

in his memory the points of triangles, a pattern of plane trigonometry.

He followed a graveled lorry road. It branched off through the deep shadow of some ornamental cacao trees. He reached some servants' huts and beyond these he could see the rear of the big house.

Only a couple of the huts were lighted, their woven shutters down, the light coming through in slits and points as through a basket. He paused by one of the windows and looked inside. A buxom native woman stood nursing an infant while her lord lay at his ease in a bed, spelling out the words of a comic book entitled "Space Man." Thus was the language of Samuel Johnson being spread across the oceans and continents!

Beyond were the rear verandas, the kitchens and pantries, a screened, roofed-over passage leading into the house.

On his previous visit he had gained only an imperfect idea of the house, and that somewhat garbled by fever. but he assumed that the screened passage would lead to the main dining room, and on its way, probably to the small dining room where he had dined with Van Hoog.

The door to the kitchen opened at his touch. The pilot light of a petrol stove, hissing softly, gave off a faint, bluish light that guided him around tables and counters, through warm spice smells, to the passageway. The door here was also unfastened, but at the other end it was locked on the inside.

Using his machete, he cut a hole for his hand, and reaching through, he freed the bolt.

Now he was inside the house itself. Something moved near him, making him jump, his hand tighten on the Thompson, his heart race. It scurried away, and he knew it was only a rat—one of the endless legion of rats that infested Borneo, from the grass hut to the Raja's palace. He stood, getting his breath, wiping sweat from his face, from his neck, and his chest. He listened. No sound, now.

He went on slowly, groping his way, one hand touching a wall. The wall was smoothly plastered rather than the usual breathing wall of woven or slatted bamboo. He found a door and a change in the hall's direction. The door opened with a slight creak. He stepped in, expecting it to be the dining room. It was not. It was

large, its limits defined by a faint light coming through a couple of windows. It was empty of furniture; it had an abandoned smell; it had the peculiar, musty odor that comes from rats and cockroaches and ghekkos even in the best houses after a few months without regular occupancy.

It was just as well, he thought. It gave him a chance to get his bearings.

He located the room's other door. He was now in another hall, the one he had followed on his previous visit. It was dimly illuminated by light from a door farther along. He could hear someone moving around, the slight shake and creak of footsteps.

He remained still, feeling for the Luger with his free hand, remembering then that he had left it behind. The steps came closer. It proved to be a servant boy in shorts and a white jacket with brass buttons. He carried a tray with a bottle and one glass. He came straight down the hall without looking up and might have passed but Dougherty shifted position and blocked his way.

Just as the boy looked up, Dougherty seized him. He turned the boy suddenly, caught his neck in the bend of his gun arm, saved the glass and bottle from falling by holding it against the boy's abdomen with the other. The boy was about twenty, he weighed about one hundred fifty pounds, and he put up a struggle that occupied all of Dougherty's weight and strength for a few seconds, but the arm cut his wind off, and soon he was willing to give up.

Dougherty had then eased him to the floor, and there, with a knee in his abdomen, he relaxed his hold enough for him to breathe.

"Young missy—where?"

The boy could not talk, but he waved a hand toward a door.

"Tuan—Van Hoog?"

He gestured, but Dougherty was unable to get his meaning.

"Where?"

The boy pointed. So Van Hoog was there after all! He kept asking, and the boy kept pointing, letting Dougherty know that Van Hoog had just returned, that he was in some far room, but he had no idea where Nana was.

He walked the boy to the empty room, tore his serving jacket into strips, bound and gagged him, hung him by his wrists to an overhead rafter so his feet barely touched the floor.

It had taken five or six minutes. He used a minute more to make sure the boy could not shout or wriggle his way free, then he went back to the hall. He stopped, hit by alarm. For half a second he didn't realize what it was. Then he knew that the faint glow that had lighted the hall had now disappeared. Either that far door had been closed or the light had been switched off.

He took a step and kicked the glass that the boy had been carrying. It clinked and went rolling *thump-thump* away across the mattings. He cursed and listened. He kept going, feeling his way, finding a door, opening it, listening, going on.

He counted his steps, taking them slowly. At twenty-three, he stopped. The door, he thought, should be there. He moved one more step, still feeling, and found it.

He expected it to be closed. It was not. It was open. A woman screamed. He retreated with a pivot, getting his back to a wall and the gun up. He had an impression of someone close to him. It was something he could feel rather than see; he caught the oily odor of a native's skin; the skin of *one certain* native— the deaf-mute, Bodoh.

He swung the Thompson upward. Its muzzle caught the man a ripping blow in the vicinity of his abdomen. With the gun high, Dougherty came down with it, trying to smash the fellow's skull, but Bodoh was moving forward and took the blow half force. He went to his knees trying to wrap his arms around Dougherty's legs, and Dougherty kicked him away and tramped his head on the floor.

It was all without the aid of sight. He tried to get clear of Bodoh's fallen body, easing to the door from which he had come. He had no feeling that anyone was in front of him; all he knew was that something had hit him, and now he was down, trying to get up from the floor.

He got to one knee, gathered his strength, and lunged to his feet. He collided with someone. He knew then it was Van Hoog. They reeled in each other's grasp. Van Hoog outweighed him, but Dougherty was taller with an advantage in reach.

He burst free. Swinging, he tried to keep the Dutchman away where his reach would help him; he tried to punch until he recovered from the blow that had put him on the floor. A left landed, and he brought up the right, hoping blindly for the jaw. It struck and paralyzed his arm with pain. Van Hoog had taken it on the top of the head.

With head down, Van Hoog charged. He carried Dougherty back. The wall stopped him. He tried to slip aside, but Van Hoog had him with a half Nelson and a stranglehold.

Dougherty drove both knees upward to Van Hoog's groin. Grunting, Van Hoog took them and bore down harder, pinning Dougherty's throat to the wall with his elbow, holding his with the Nelson.

The air was gone from Dougherty's lungs. He fought through black dizziness; through blackness turned to dancing light and exploding meteors in his eyeballs. He could feel the gathering of Van Hoog's muscles for the final application of pressure that would crush the bone and cartilage of his throat, and parrying it, he managed to twist his head and at the same instant he let his knees collapse.

Van Hoog tried to smash him harder against the wall, but Dougherty was down, doubled over in the right angle of floor and wall. He twisted, drew himself into a ball, and drove out with both feet. Van Hoog was down over him.

Ordinarily he might have seized that momentary advantage but he lacked strength, his lungs were still bursting for air. He rolled; he got free. He reached for his pistol, a reflexive movement, again forgetting he had left it behind in favor of the Thompson.

He had dropped the Thompson, but he had no idea where. He felt for it on the floor. He got up and took a step and his toe hit it, sending it clattering away across the floor. He staggered after it; he tripped and fell. He crawled, hunting it. He tried to get up and collided hard with the wall, knocking himself down again. And there was the gun making a hard bar beneath him.

He got hold of it and tried to draw it from under his body, but its forward sight caught and his own weight was holding it down. He engaged in a mad, blind

wrestle with the gun before he got wits about him, stood, and lifted the gun afterward. He turned in the direction he thought Van Hoog to be, snapped the safety off, and pressed the trigger.

The gun tore the dark with a jack-hammer series of explosions. Its recoil turned him groggily around. By the multiple flashes of powder he could see that he had uselessly fired into the wall. He turned, trigger down, raking the hall in front of him, dimly realizing that it was empty of life. Van Hoog was gone; Bodoh was gone.

He backed away with the gun pounding itself to the end of the magazine. He knew he should stop but he was unable to. He pulled the clip and inserted another. The air was raw to his lungs, filled with fumes of cordite. He walked through a door—staggered through it; he was in the darkness of an unfamiliar room; he kept going, unable to do otherwise, still groggy from his struggle with Van Hoog.

He bumped a chair without meaning to and he sat down. He almost fell from it to the floor. He sat quietly getting his wits about him. Men were shouting and charging through the house. Voices came from every side. Over their cries he could hear Van Hoog bellowing commands in Dutch.

Nana—where was she? It was her cry that had warned him, saved him from Bodoh. He had it groggily in his mind that she was a prisoner. So he could not leave.

"Nana!" he called, his voice hoarse from the abuse his throat had taken. "Nana!"

He got up and walked. "Nana!" he called again, and a blast of gunfire met him. Someone had fired at the sound of his voice, fired and missed, and Dougherty cut loose again with the Thompson.

This time he knew when to quit. He'd hit the man—he knew it. He walked forward and found his body on the floor. A guardsman, he thought. Too dark to see. Not Van Hoog. Not that kind of luck. No, he could hear the roaring voice of Van Hoog issuing commands, ordering some men here, others there, blocking escape.

"Nana!"

"Here!"

She was right beside him. He heard her voice with a surge of relief. He reached for her, but her hand was already beneath his arm.

"Come!" she said.

He ran with her, letting her lead him, stumbling over things in the dark, through one room and another. He no longer had the least idea where they were. The house was very large. He went up three steps, down again; he smelled the night air from an open doorway without seeing the slightest sign of it. They turned a corner and came to the door with a half-naked guardsman facing them, a rifle silhouetted in his hands.

"Berhentil" screamed the native, taking alarm. He came around with the rifle only to be smashed backward by a blast from the sub-machine gun.

The guardsman fired once in the air. His bullet ripping the ceiling overhead. It showered fragments of wood. He sprawled half across the sill, firing again, his second bullet striking his own leg, glancing off the bone, cutting slivers from the floor, plucking at Dougherty's left shoe sole as it went past.

They stepped over him and ran across a porch to the yard.

The compound was filled with shadowy movement. From one of the front gate towers a spotlight was swinging back and forth, making the grass look grayish with great blocks of shadow from the trees.

Dougherty and Nana were now beyond the servants' quarters; they found shadow in the trees; they emerged and were caught in the spotlight's brilliance. They ran with the *rat-rat-rat* and multiple flashes of a machine gun sending bullets that tore the turf past them, away from them, and back again. A small embankment and a foot-step ditch lay ahead. Dougherty flung the girl so that she fell, rolling like a supple ball into its cover, and he followed, face first. He crawled, saying, "Go, go!" to keep her moving ahead of him while the bullets, from two directions now, tore dirt and twigs, filled the air, choking dust and fragments.

The embankment ended. He stopped, holding the girl by one ankle to keep her from going too far. He breathed with his head tight to the ground, his mouth in the dirt. At last he dared raise his head and look around.

By moonlight and spotlight he could see men on the move, surrounding them. He looked at the gate where the Chinese boy and Brother John were waiting.

"Now, now, your Bren!" he bellowed. "Cover us."

He got no answer. For a long two or three seconds he thought they had fled. He started to curse them when the Bren cut loose at one angle and Hip Ying's smaller gun flashed at another. The spotlight blinked off. Holding the girl's hand, Dougherty covered the remaining distance to the gate.

"Good enough, good enough!" he said, getting them to pick up guns and retreat with him. Outside he said, "No, not the paddies. They'll expect that. We'll circle the compound, then we'll decide what next. Oh, Allah, what a cobra pit!" He said that over and over as he kept running. "What a cobra pit! But we bit them back. Van Hoog, damn him, he'll remember us!"

Chapter Thirteen

THEY WERE AWAY from the native huts, apparently out of danger on a path that wound through a papaya orchard.

Dougherty took hold of Nana's arm and asked, "Did you find something?"

"What do you mean?"

"The strongbox."

"Oh, of course not!" She cried with exasperation.

"Girl, girl, I'm not blaming you. But I had to know. He discovered you there—Van Hoog?"

"He returned," she said bitterly. "If he'd been there when I came, or hadn't returned at all, either way, but *when* he came. That was the unlucky thing!"

"Aye?"

"I was forcing Amdah to get me the things from the vault, and there he was!" Speaking through her teeth, in the native tongue, she cursed Van Hoog.

"What did he do?"

Instead of answering, she pulled the shirt from her shoulder. He could not see, but passing his hand over her smooth skin he could feel the hot swellings of a bruise.

"He hit you."

"He tried to break my shoulder."

Dougherty remembered how he had had Van Hoog dead ahead of him for a couple of seconds, and how he had blown his chance, firing into the wall.

"Keep coming," he said when she hesitated.

"Where?"

He was not sure himself.

"Not back to the boat!" she cried.

"Damn it, now that we've stirred this hornet's nest—"

"No!"

He was going to urge her but she cut him off. "Do you know what he was doing? He was getting a safari ready to go upriver."

"Today?"

"Yes. His boys and their loads are in the compound."

"Going up the Nam Poo?"

"Yes."

"Where is his safari?"

It pleased her to think the same thing had entered his mind as hers. "You think we might take it over. Yes, I think we might."

"Where is it?" he repeated.

"At the sheds."

"Guarded?"

"Who knows?"

"Yes, it's the moment to gamble!"

They increased their speed, swinging around the compound, watching the wall and watching for pursuit. He said, "*Where* up the Nam Poo? Do you know?"

"There was a messenger came about sundown. A native. I saw him. I was there waiting for Amdah to come from town so I could make him open the safe, and I saw them talking."

"You mean you knew the native's village, and so—"

"I just saw the kapala he wore."

Dougherty saved his breath for the hard going, but his mind operated, questioning the importance she gave to the kapala. A kapala, the cloth head dress worn by many tribes, was of batik in a design which was sometimes a coat of arms, or again might indicate the wearer's caste, or the village he came from.

They were in jungle that grew dense and black, pressing close to the compound on that side. She took the lead and he followed. He kept running afoul of thorns and vines, stumbling over roots, but she seemed to be guided by some extra sense, like a forest animal that can see in the dark.

So they covered a mile and were on the upper side, on slightly rising ground, with the compound under their gaze.

They approached the wall. No one was there to challenge them. Dougherty looked for Hip Ying, who was carrying the snips, but he saw that in the rush of pursuit a gate had been left open and unguarded.

"Those huts by the shed," she whispered.

The black carriers were up, frightened, whispering to one another in the dark. They were bush boys, black and kinky-haired, Negritos whose ancestors had inhabited the Islands before the successive floods of immigra-

tion from the Orient. They watched pop-eyed as Dougherty came up with the Thompson leveled.

"*No-tembak!*" their leader cried.

"*No-tembak.* Sure. O.K. *Mari!* You come now." He walked among them and had a look at the canvas-wrapped bundles that made a little heap on the ground. He hefted one. It was unexpectedly heavy. He pulled the canvas back and put his nose to the opening. It had the unmistakable odor of opium.

"You're not taking this upriver!" he cried to their capito. When the boy failed to understand, he repeated in the Island jargon. The capito nodded vigorously. Dougherty believed he was lying and threatened him with the machine gun, and the boy dropped on his knees pleading that he told only the truth.

"Can't you *see?*" Nana asked, coming up behind him. "The opium *does* go upriver. It's traded *there,* can't you see that?"

"For what?"

"Let's trade it and see."

Dougherty still could not reconcile himself to the thing. It was all wrong. It meant that everything he had learned in Singapore was wrong.

A man was coming at a long-legged run across the yard, the flat surface of his gun shining in rhythm. He wore a kuftan and turban; he was one of the Island Moslems, evidently left to guard the carriers and their freight. He realized that something was wrong, came to a stop, and turned back, running harder than before.

There was no time to talk. "Move, damn it, move!" Dougherty said. "Move or we'll all be dead!"

The carry-boys picked up their packages and fell into line, following Brother John and Nana, with Dougherty and Hip Ying coming up at the rear. They got outside without incident, and out of range of the lights, and they were again in the tunneling blackness of a jungle footpath.

"What did Dr. Sung tell you?" Dougherty asked the Chinese. "What about opium?"

"Nothing. He tell me nothing."

"Just to watch me!"

"Get you out all safe and sound, be your man. Save your skin maybe all over again like in Singapore. That good, hey?"

He could not see Hip Ying's face, but he had a picture of it grinning like one of those sardonic bronze gods in a Buddhist temple.

"What a fool's journey are we embarked on now?" he asked, speaking to himself rather than the Chinese. "Tell me this, where is she taking us?"

"Trade opium, maybe get pretty rich, take all dough back to Dr. Sung, get big cut, hey?"

Aye, Dougherty thought, that was the Wuch'ang kind of loyalty. The kind Dr. Sung expected. But Dougherty would see the Doctor dead first—dead with his own bullet lead in his guts.

"You bet!" he said to Hip Ying. "Anything for organization!"

They traveled steadily for an hour. The last sound of pursuit had long vanished. The footpath broadened so here and there the moon found them. They came to an open area overgrown by weeds high as a man's armpits. The skeleton frames of huts could be seen farther along. It was an abandoned village. They crossed pitfall-soft earth where yams had recently been dug. The new village was just beyond—palm-mat bungalows on the high ground and huts on high stilts where the ground was low and swampy.

Nana fell back to walk beside Dougherty and say, "These are Muhats. The river is just beyond. We can hire canoe boys here."

"And have the news relayed to Van Hoog in ten minutes!"

"No. Not by these. Not the Muhats."

The Muhats were members of an unconquered bush tribe, head-hunters, their name synonymous with savagery.

With a short laugh, Dougherty said, "Muhats! Are you sure they're an improvement over Van Hoog?"

"They know me. They're friendly; they hate Van Hoog."

"Noble tribe!"

"Well, stay back. I'll go talk."

The boys had all stopped and rested their packages. They watched apprehensively, ready to flee, as the girl walked on by herself, a slight figure in the moonlight. Cupping hands, she called something. There was movement among the branches overhead, a man hung by the

hands, swung his body back and forth, and dropped to the ground.

Nana spun and laughed. She knew his name. They exchanged a few words in a tongue Dougherty did not understand. The native then walked to a bare, beaten knoll, picked up a spear, and drove in into a log on the ground. Then, using his fingers, he drummed the spear with a swift rhythm producing a drum sound, low but with a penetrating vibrance not unlike the "tongue" of a hollowed tree trunk. Other men appeared, some of them to stand curiously by, others to move off to their huts, all of them armed. The villagers had been warned of their approach, they had received a message, but in what silent manner Dougherty could not guess.

Their headman appeared. Most of the bush natives were short in stature, but powerful, giving them an apelike appearance, but this man was upward of six feet and slim. He was naked except for a dark loincloth and ornaments, one wired to another, covering his chest like a coat of mail.

"I heard gunfire," he said in excellent English.

"Yes, Dega," Nana said. "We had some differences with my husband."

"Is he dead?" he asked pleasantly.

"No."

Dega made a sign that that was too bad.

"I need boys and a canoe," she said and made a sign indicating a journey far, far into the uplands, and Dega nodded, called a warrior, and sent him running, splashing barefoot through shallow water, calling other natives by name. In an hour they had gathered a few supplies together, mats for sleeping and shelter, some bags of native meal, and had set out in two canoes with five native paddlers to each of them. An eleventh Muhat native, a bow-legged old man named Tadaro, was in the bow of the lead canoe, a pole in his hands, serving as guide.

"You have friends!" Dougherty said with admiration.

"Dega was my father's friend. My father sent him to the English school at Sandakan. Did you see his ornaments?"

"Enough copper to finish the bottom of Jaske's boat!"

"No, that was gold. It comes from the hills. Each year they go to the hills and wash the gold from gravel,

catching it on unclipped goatskins. They burn the goat skins, melt the gold, and refine it in little fireclay ovens, using tallow and hand bellows. In the old days some Portuguese decided they would learn the secret of the gold and tried to follow them. Only one of the Portuguese ever returned. He was crazy; he couldn't even talk his own language. When I was a little girl I remember hearing the old men tell about him, they called him Malo Pablo, and he used to sit on the dock at Tengah and laugh and jabber his senseless words. The superstitious ones said it was the language of the devil he'd learned through torture."

"What had they done to him?"

"I don't know; there wasn't a mark on him except for two little holes drilled in his skull, one above each ear. They had cauterized the skin leaving the holes open, and sometimes the men would play a joke on him by putting bent sticks in them so they would look like horns."

Dougherty restrained a shudder. "And *these* are the men we have paddling us!"

"They are my friends. Besides, we are not after the gold."

"Aye!" said Dougherty heartily, "damn the gold!"

Dawn broke, and the sun climbed through the jungle purple. On the river, birds were flying, great fishing birds with slow wings, that swooped and splashed water and sailed away beyond the high treetops with their food. The river was a broad stream, apparently without current, its shores hidden by the trees that grew down into the water. The jungle opened, there was a dock, its piles rotting, its planks crumbled and carried away by the river. Sitting back a few yards was a storehouse so overgrown by vines it looked like a knoll in the forest. They passed it, the boys paddling steadily, the jungle closed in, and they emerged again on a fairly new house and some workers' huts. A white man dressed only in khaki trousers stood with a cane knife in one hand, shading his eyes with the other, and Dougherty thought he recognized one of the brick-faced Englishmen who had been drinking beer in the pub that evening when he first met Van Hoog. He waved, the man waved, and again it was jungle, this time without break, all day, and after a night camp, all the next.

The river had swiftened. The low country of North Borneo was a shallow strip, in most places less than ten miles wide, but a wider indentation made here by the erosion of the Nam Poo hills, deeply forested, lay ahead of them; beyond were more hills, higher, bluish from haze, covered with timber; and rising yet beyond those, magnificently, were volcanic peaks, a forbidding, jagged barrier.

Working through the morning, using bits of bright cloth given by the paddlers, Nana had built a patchwork design, a cloth mosaic on a square of sticky tessu bark, which from a distance formed a striking imitation of a batik design. When she was finished, she called Tedaro and showed it to him.

"Sep-u-tot!" Tedaro said, coming down hard on the last syllable. Then, pointing toward a formalized hawk worked in red on an interlaced design of yellow and blue, said, "No, Soo-kah!" coming down even harder on the last syllable.

"You know the village?"

He shook his head in a pop-eyed manner, indicating that the Sookahs and Muhats were not friends; indeed by his manner that the Sookahs were the friends of no one.

She said, "Mana?" which means where is their country? Tedaro answered with gestures and hand signs indicating two branchings of the river; cascades, and a chasm bridged from on high. Afterward, still talking more with hands than with lips, he repeated and to give added force, made the sign taboo, which indeed the country might be, for the bush natives had taboos by the hundreds—tribal taboos, village taboos, and the personal taboos which the individual assumed from the portents of his nativity.

They kept going up a river becoming steadily more difficult. The natives poled and waded, pulling line, bringing the dugout canoes through swift water. When the current diminished, they made progress by hunting the quiet water from shore to shore. On both sides rose bluffs, steep, solid green with only here and there, near the crests, a few jutting crags of quartzite. Later the sedimentary strata ended, and the land was deeply covered by basaltic lava flows which frequently stood out in cliffs like European castles, or made causeways

of barrel-like blocks. Eroding, the lava formed a soil that was fire brown; it affected the foliage, too, giving things a more vivid green color.

With only the most primitive equipment and supplies, they now commenced to feel the rigors of the journey. There in the hill country, a chill settled with late darkness, and a blanket would have been a welcome addition to their bark-cloth coverings. The native meal, a mixture of rice and dried sweet-potato pulp rough-pounded together, satisfied the natives, who cooked it with whatever fish, rodent, snake, or beetle they happened to capture, but it was not intended for the greater refinement of the white man's stomach—not even for Brother John, who complained bitterly. On the second morning Dougherty shot a wild pig, chilled the carcass as best he could, and had the natives barbecue it, but the flavor was strong as musk and scarcely an improvement over anything.

He had watched for pursuit, but there was no sign of any. He sent one of the boys to a pinnacle to watch the river, but he reported no movement. That day they took it more easily, stopping at a good hour for siesta, because even in the cooler country of the hills it is dangerous to travel through the direct hours of sun.

On the steep bluff above them was a small clutch of mud and wood huts surrounded by a circular fence. Its inhabitants were small, ugly, kinky-haired brown men. Their faces were much disfigured by scarring, they had barbs run through ear lobes and noses. They watched but would not approach closer than a hundred yards despite the signals of friendship made first by Dougherty and then by Tedaro.

Dougherty had looked inside several of the trade packages, now with an hour to spare, he went through them carefully. Their chief contents were opium balls identical to those he had found in Singapore—dark brown, almost tarlike balls, each weighing a pound or so, each wrapped in banana leaves which had become cured by resins of the opium, and dried tight and hard. There was a small quantity of other stuff, too—the more common trade items—cartridges of various calibers; some folding machetes; some women's compacts, lipsticks, and perfumes; some medicines, chiefly aspirin, atabrine, quinine, and sulfadiazine. And there was also a small

bag of money, all copper and silver for convenience in dealing with the natives.

He unpacked everything, and then put everything back except some of the lipsticks and machetes and a bottle of the quinine, of which he took twenty grains immediately, a double dosage to make up for the days he had been without.

The opium was obviously the chief item of value. He estimated that the total of it amounted to 400 pounds. Such a quantity even at the straight-government-monopoly rate would be worth a small fortune. On the underground, of course, it would be much more, as much as $600 a pound, if a man wished to trade in that kind of misery.

Well, Daugherty didn't. He had never trafficked in opium or women or with the Reds. He liked sometimes to think that his moral scruples had been the great barrier to his success in the Orient, the real reason he was there, after all those years, a failure in one or another mat and slat port, suffering mosquitoes, cockroaches, heat, and sweat, drinking boiled water with its musty taste of dead protozoa, poor liquor . . .

But still 400 pounds at the underground rate! It made one think. It was a temptation to turn back by some other route, reach the sea, and find a prahu, dhow, or tramp steamer which would take him and all the black balls to Malaya, to Indo-China, even to the Philippines, where he could dispose of them and never worry for money again. But to carry them on, into this wilderness that smacked of the preposterous . . .

But he did not turn back. He never once thought he would turn back.

He approached the native village holding up the machetes and lipsticks. The natives were still suspicious but they relented at sight of such desirable items and traded fruits, sago rock-bread, and comb honey.

The comb honey was very good, and it made an especially welcome addition to their diet. They ate and went on through late afternoon and camped for the night at the foot of some rapids.

The river became a succession of rapids. They finally gave up trying to travel by canoe at all and took to the footpath, which here was well marked along the eastern bank.

They came to a canyon whose sheer walls left not even room for the path. They had to climb by switchbacks. Caught on the heights at midday beneath the killing rays of the sun, all they could do was go on and on, until at last the narrow shade of a side gully saved them. There they rested with the river far below, a white torrent over rocks.

Nana's legs, between her shorts and the tops of her boots, were cut by thorns and smeared with blood. Even Brother John was about done for. But Hip Ying merely looked a trifle more dehydrated than usual.

Dougherty grinned at him and managed to make words with his thirst-sticky mouth. "Aye, and now how do you like your task of rescuing my life for your employer?"

"Tough job, sometime," Hip Ying conceded.

"Worse than warehouse? Worse than Singapore?"

"Sure."

"You want to turn back?"

"Whatever you do. Those my instructions. I don't ask for favor my employer. Some job easy, some tough."

"Good man!" Dougherty said. Aye, too damned much of a good man. Tight as a burr in a man's hair, but he would lose him somehow. If the time came that he had to lose him, he'd *lose* him. And he thought, what the hell is in my mind? I'm breaking the opium racket, not engaging in it. Dr. Sung's hundred-thousand-dollar reward is riches enough for any man. Why would I want to lose him?

He dozed, reconciled to heat and thirst. Some of the boys snored. A slight wind blew. The flies were very bad and he had no nets. They had left with scarcely any of the equipment that the white man considers a necessity in the tropics. He got up for a look downriver. It shimmered in the heat, a strip of white reflection bound in by the reflection of rock and the solid gray of foliage. He could see nothing, none of the moving dark spots that would mean men in pursuit.

He noticed that Nana was up. She, too, was looking, the same thought in her mind.

"No?" she asked.

He shook his head. Then he said, "But he'll be coming. He'll always be coming." He couldn't help feeling that about Van Hoog. There are some men who can be

stopped only by killing. And it would come to that. He knew it; he had known it for a long time.

They went on. The trail was a straight line cut centuries ago from the basalt, worn smooth by thousands of feet, but in all their hours of travel they had met no one. Finally, as the stars were coming out, they reached the crest, and half an hour later their nostrils detected the wet, sour smell of a water hole.

The uplands had been very dry, and now, just before the onset of the monsoon, the water hole was an area of trampled mud, with only a trickle of fresh water coming from under a ledge. The bones and hair of wild oxen, mired from previous rainy seasons, could be seen here and there, greenish and old, accounting for the bad odor of the place, but the water was good, it was clear and cold, and after digging beneath the ledge they were rewarded by a sizable stream.

They rested, and then were moving again at dawn. Passing through a great hardwood forest, the footpath was joined by other footpaths to become wide, a jungle thoroughfare, old as the basalt trail through the canyon, a main passageway before the first white man, before even the arrival of the Moslems, perhaps even dating back to the first man and the first woman whom scientists placed on this very island of Borneo!

They came to a village with the houses built in trees, platforms with thatch overhead, ladders leading to them, the ground beneath a maze of paths littered with human droppings. Its inhabitants were Negrito in type, traders who had set up by the footpath to bargain and steal and offer various services which were in fact only a bounty to allow safe passage.

Old Tedaro talked to their headman, trading copper coins for a basket of fruit, and securing in the bargain a boy to guide them.

The boy was about fifteen, a scrawny four feet six, with the face of an old man. Within two hours Brother John caught him in the act of stealing a machete, and at twilight he disappeared for good, taking fifty precious rounds of 303 ammunition with him.

By evening the path had led them back to the rim. The canyon, which in lower country resembled a steep V, was here walled by almost perpendicular stone, a steplike series of cliffs with spires and towers of stone rising

from the walls. One could look down on the twig heaps of eagles, fish eaters, watching the river for their prey. There was no passage of the canyon, no cliff trail to the bottom, and no chance of fording the torrent had there been one, yet Tedaro was certain that the Sookah tribesmen occupied the mountains of the far side.

They camped, arose at dawn, and went on. The footpath skirted the rim, never wandering from it for more than a mile. The river's sound became ever louder. There were cascades below. Haze, rising between the walls, made the depths look gray-purple and gave the walls a dark sparkle.

The cascades continued for three or four miles, then at a narrowing of the gorge where the walls were so steep they seemed to actually overhang, a suspension bridge had been built from one side to the other.

The bridge was four- or five-hundred-feet long, a spider's span, a footway of hardwood slats notched at the ends and set in grass rope. Above the footway, about waist-high on the average man, were two ropes, very thick, of loose weave with fresh strands woven in among old, which were the chief supports; an intricate criss-crossing of smaller ropes ran from these down to the footway. The length of the span made it very heavy. It sagged deeply into the canyon, its shape approaching that of a quarter circle.

As they stood at the log landing, a Negrito resembling one of the same diminutive tribe at the trading village came clambering from below, hand over hand up a rope, got hold of the footway, swinging it, twisting it almost bottom up, and came running sticky footed as a fly, his hands out demanding toll.

Chapter Fourteen

THE NATIVE CAME to a stop crouched on the footway about ten feet distant, grinning, making hand signs, talking money. He was wiry and tough as a monkey. His posture and his bounding, knee-up way of jumping made him all the more resemble a monkey. He had teeth filed to points, stained black from betel. Through his nose was thrust a polished, double-pointed barb of bone which in a grotesque manner resembled a mustache. He kept waving his fingers, counting the number and weight of Dougherty's party, and naming the price of five Sawarak dollars.

The Sawarak buck was standardized against that of the Straits Settlements, which gave it a value of three to one American, and the price was lenient enough, but Dougherty dickered as a matter of principle, knowing that the fellow would have no respect for him otherwise. Other monkey-like forms were now moving, clambering up other ropes, some to the bridge, others to the cliff where their huts, like swallows' nests, had been built. They were all chattering at once, enraged on the subject of money. Dougherty compromised on the figure of three and a half, and instantly all was well and they made hand signs of friendship.

Dougherty dreaded the bridge; he had all his life suffered from an apprehension of high places, but he went first. Its initial downward steepness proved even more unsteadying than its bob and sway. He did not make the mistake of going slowly. He walked right on, not looking at the abyss, not even at the narrow footway, but at the closing lines of its perspective far in front. By degrees the drunken feeling of the first steps left him, he grew in confidence, he even received a giddy sense of pleasure from the sensation of dangling in space on spiderwebs. Then he was in the middle, deep between the walls. The river seemed very close, its roar surrounding him, its dampness in his face, the footway slick under his boots. There were trembly movements behind him. The others were on their way. Soon the climb began,

steeper and steeper, leaving him winded and sweating at the far end.

He considered leaving Brother John there with the Bren to guard against pursuit, for this would indeed be a sweet place to catch Van Hoog, but he gave up the idea. He could take no such risk of antagonizing the natives. Not in a new country and one that might prove to be an enemy country. They kept going through spotty jungle, through a forest spotted with big clearings, and after that through an open hill country where grass stood brittle yellow, sometimes higher than a man's head.

At siesta time they reached a village of neat slat and pole bungalows and stopped before entering the single street. They waited until the headman, surrounded by a delegation of his warriors, came out to receive them.

"The batik!" cried Nana, pointing to the kapalas they wore. It was true—their kapalas, turban-like with high, stiff fronts, were batik of the interlaced yellow and blue design with a scarlet, formalized hawk as the surmounting figure. They were of the people whose messenger had come to Van Hoog.

"Sookah!" was the word passed from one to another, and even the Muhats, the most dreaded head-hunters of the low country, held back, for it was one thing to meet a Sookah in your own land, and another to face him in his country, among his gods, the strange, unknown gods that howled through the canyons and the mountains that surrounded him.

Dougherty went forward alone and unarmed. As he got closer he saw that these Sookah were not one of the heavy-featured Island tribes. They were a more aristocratic breed, probably descended from a Malayan or even Arabic invasion of many centuries ago. Their features, bearing, and obvious intelligence set them apart. The batik they wore was of silk, and not of that country; it was an example of the best from Java. The headman was unarmed, but his men carried spears tipped with trade steel, and somewhat in the background, as if not to intrude upon the traditional aspect of the reception, were half a dozen men crouched with modern bolt-action rifles in their hands. The rifles were Mannlichers, all but one, and that a Mauser. Dutch Mannlichers, so it was easy to assume that the guns had come over the mountains from the south, although an outlaw trader from

the English territories might have violated regulations and brought them there.

Dougherty had only a half-formed plan, and so it was almost a surprise to himself when he heard his voice, showing a confidence he did not feel, saying, "We come from the Big Sahib. We were sent by your great friend, Van Hoog."

The headman understood him, but he chose to answer in the jargon of the coasts, half English and half Malay. He acknowledged the greatness of Van Hoog, and bade them welcome. Then he asked if they would stay or continue immediately toward the Red Kampong. Dougherty assumed that the "Red Kampong" was either the chief city of the Sookahs or the place for which the trade cargo was intended, or perhaps they were one and the same. He was reluctant to go deeper into a country which might grow hostile and enclose him; he had hopes of obtaining proof of the traffic more easily than that. Here, in this village, he thought, might be information of its exact nature, and perhaps he could secure a couple of natives for testimony. Of one thing he was now certain—Dr. Sung had been in error about the source of the opium. Even had he not found himself carrying a cargo of the stuff in the direction he *was* carrying it, he could have seen that this was not an opium-growing country. It had little sign of agriculture of any kind, certainly nothing as specialized as the growing of poppies.

Nana came and directed a question to the headman. "Can we reach the Kampong tonight?"

Dougherty said, "Tomorrow. The boys can use a rest."

"No, tonight."

"My dear, the boys are weary. We need a siesta."

"Look!" she said and pointed at the clouds which each day had been building themselves more highly and solidly in the sky, innocent white at the surface, but gray in depth, harbingers of the approaching rains. "Soon there will be much time for siesta. We will go on."

"*Besok!*" said the headman, meaning that their departure next sunrise would be soon enough.

"*Hara ini!*" Dougherty answered, his lift of shoulders indicating that there was no reasoning with a woman, at least not this woman, that they would leave now.

"Tuan is in very great *ga-put*," said the headman with a sign of good humor.

Dougherty muttered that yes, he was *ga-put* indeed, accepting it in its slang sense although he knew that the headman meant merely that he was in a curious hurry.

The headman bade them farewell and sent an escort of five spear-carrying guides. Dougherty was thinking that there would be no turning back with mere evidence if *she* had her way. And he suspected, more strongly with the passage of every mile, that she knew quite well what would be found at the end of the long footpath.

It was hot, and the nearness of monsoon brought an extra, pressing sultriness. It was all open country now, grassy hills with only stray patches of trees crowded together, making solid tops like umbrellas. As evening came all turned a golden green: it was a picture-perfect country, warm olive hues backed by the icy blue of cloud-ringed peaks, and the perfect contrast of shapes, too—the rounded hills backed by the severe geometry of mountains, and tired as he was, it pleased his artist soul.

The sun was setting when they reached a walled village of wood, sun brick, and thatch. This was the Red Kampong, main city of the Sookah people.

Their escort of warriors had long ago outdistanced them and were probably inside the walls. Dougherty decided not to follow them. "We'll make camp here," he said, stopping among dwarfed, brownish trees at the side of a dry water course.

The village was surrounded by fields of irregular shapes, each rimmed by thorn fences turned the color of tobacco by drought. Some herdsmen had just driven their goats and little, hump-backed cattle inside some corral enclosures for the night. The animals had stirred a haze of dust that hung and hung without settling. No one had come from the open gate of the Kampong wall to see them. The herdsmen had scarcely glanced their way. Cookfires were burning here and there among the huts, the smoke climbing straight up until, meeting a heavy layer in the atmosphere, it spread into mushroom shapes.

Tedaro came up and said, "Tuan, the boys are complaining. They have no water."

"Tell them to wait."

Tedaro nodded and withdrew. They waited as the sun slid from sight, leaving a soft, phosphorescent glow that turned the hills the color of peaches and the brick wall of the Kampong the color of blood. Then the colors

faded, and all was gray with a single star twinkling.

Dougherty stopped beside Nana, who was sitting cross-legged on the ground, combing her hair. She looked up at him through her hair and kept combing it. It was very glossy and made static sounds from friction.

"Is this our destination?" he asked.

"You mean you don't know?" she asked in a teasing voice.

"Of course not. But—"

"But I do?" And she laughed at him.

"Damn it!" He was ill-tempered, and as thirsty as any of his men. "Of course you do."

"It is *not* our destination."

"Where then?"

"It bars the way to our destination."

"And then what?"

She shrugged. "I really don't know as much as you think."

"What are we doing carrying opium here, like carrying coals to hell? An insane journey! Your idea, my dear. I've resigned to your judgment every step of the way—"

"Thank you."

"Stop that. We've reached the point where I have to know as much as you do—what does Van Hoog trade the opium for?"

"He is quite rich," she said, putting down the comb, a native affair shaped something like a fork. "You have seen for yourself he is quite rich. But I *don't* know the secret of it. I've suspected, yes, but I don't know. I sent you to learn what you could, remember? Would I have sent you if I knew? No, I'm not sure what he trades for, but we are close to it." Then her voice hardened "But I will tell you this—you are a fool to trust the Chinese."

"Which Chinese?" He meant Dr. Sung or Hip Ying.

"Any Chinese."

"Hip Ying once saved my life."

"Then one day he may want to take it back again."

"Oh, rot! Hip Ying is all right. This trade—you must have some idea."

She responded by starting to comb her hair again.

"Damn a woman!" he said, walking away.

He stood smoking a hand-fashioned cigarette and looking at the village. It was large, as native villages went.

Judging by its number of huts, the roofs of which could be seen above the wall on slightly rising ground, it had six or seven hundred inhabitants. One of the buildings was very long, well over four hundred feet, and it sat higher than the rest, on piles that lifted it as much as fifteen or eighteen feet from the ground. It was a long-house of the type found along the coast or on the marshy rivers of the island, misplaced here in the uplands. Here, he supposed, it served simply as a spirit house, and not as a communal residence.

She followed him, pulling her hair back, and smiled. "That Chinese at Singapore, is it true he offered you only thirty thousand dollars?"

His lie to her made Dougherty feel lower than a swine, but he said, "Yes."

"You're not serious."

He thought she had somehow learned that the amount was actually one hundred thousand. But she went on, "Don't be a fool! Thirty thousand! Why, the opium, those ugly little balls, are worth many times more than that. We could just have gone back to the ship and—But what's the use of talking about that? Now that we are here we will trade it. For what? What do you think? Ounce for ounce, what is worth more than opium? Gold? Yes, slightly more. Only slightly. Then what else? Industrial diamonds, of course!" She watched for the effect of her words. She said, teasing, "Would one or two *pounds* of industrial diamonds take us to San Francisco?"

Us, she had said. Dougherty grabbed her by the shoulders, turned her to face him, and pulled her to him. She came willingly. Her lips were slightly parted. She seemed to be laughing at him. He kissed her. He kissed her again and again, trying by the force of his ardor to make her feel what he felt, as he sensed she did not feel at all.

She brought her hands up between them and with slow strength, little by little, she pushed and twisted her shoulders back and forth, moving away.

"Later!" she whispered, and he let her go. He started to say something, and she silenced him. "Listen!"

He noticed the quiet that had descended on the camp, a silence with tenseness in it. He thought of Van Hoog and looked, but he could see nothing on the footpath that dimly ribboned over the long rise of ground to the north-

west. A drum and marimba-like instrument were being played very softly in the village.

"What is it?"

"They see something."

He started to speak to old Tedaro, and then saw a man coming from the village.

The man was heavy-set and old, with slave brands puckering the skin at his shoulders. He said, "Sahib!" to Dougherty, and made hand signs indicating he would like to escort him inside the Kampong.

Dougherty took out his pistol and gave it to the old man to carry. He intended the pistol as a gift to the tribal king or headman, but he did not wish to appear unfriendly by wearing it into his house.

"Wish me luck!" Dougherty called to Nana, and walked off following the slave.

His arrival caused not the slighest ripple of excitement. There were no children following him, no one along the path to stare at him as there generally were in those back-bush villages. The Sookah went on preparing the meals, or they lay outside the huts having an evening gossip.

The huts were of mud-brick and wood construction with high gabled roofs thatched with palm. The longhouse seemed to be deserted, having only one spot of ruddy lamplight, and that he supposed the endless flame of the spirit room guarding the heads of enemies taken in battle. It was built of massive timbers with walls of slatwork; its length, as he had already estimated, was better than four hundred feet, it was forty feet in width, supported on piles which lifted it higher than a tall man could reach. A platform ran all the way around with ladders placed at twenty- or twenty-five-foot intervals. The place bore the signs of great age, its inner timbers, where they could be seen, were fumed black by the spirit fires, the ladders and the platform were worn slick, smooth, and shiny by generations of naked feet.

Toward the middle of the village enclosure, about two hundred yards from the longhouse, was another large building, obviously the chief's house. It was a slatternly assortment of additions to a central two-story portion, all with sway-back roofs and gables surmounted by Siamese-style round spires. It was built on piles but is was not as high as the longhouse.

"Raja!" said the old slave, nodding when he saw Dougherty looking at the house. *"Astana!"*

Dougherty jerked his head with a laugh. "Palace!" he muttered. "Palace, indeed!"

A veranda ran along the front. The veranda was strewn with old straw sitting pads, tables, screens, and mattings. There were six or seven doors leading from the veranda to various rooms of the house. All the doors were draped with filthy brindle and striped cotton. The drapes waved in the slight draft that passed through the house. No one was in sight.

Dougherty waited a moment before understanding that the native wanted him to go on alone from that point.

"The gun," said Dougherty. "A gift. *Bagi*. You understand? Take it to him."

The slave made the sign no-no-no, so Dougherty had to take the Luger himself.

Holding it by the barrel, he climbed some steps to the veranda. He stopped. The gun made him feel conspicuous and uncomfortable, but no one seemed to be watching him. Apparently there was no guard anywhere.

"Please come in," a man's voice said, surprising him by its nearness.

"Aye, your pardon, I beg you." He located the source of the voice through one of the near doorways. "The gun. A gift. The boy would not carry it to you."

"Please come in," the man repeated, speaking the English words very correctly although with a strong Oriental twang.

Dougherty lifted the drape. The room before him was dark save for the ruddy glow of a tiny charcoal stove. He hesitated a few seconds, making out the man nearby, who sat cross-legged on a piece of straw matting—a middle-sized, middle-aged man, very slim, probably of mixed Chinese and Malay blood. He was dressed in the Chinese-Malay manner too, in a turban of the kapala type, in a robe of black, in loose trousers also of a dark hue. On his feet were simple sandals. He was holding a heavy copper pan in which he had brewed tea from water heated over the charcoal. The charcoal was not the purest carbon and its smoke filled the air, smarting Dougherty's eyes.

"Please!" The man bowed, indicating the place of honor at his left. And "Ah!" he breathed, with his eyes on the Luger.

"Raja, the gift!" Dougherty laid the gun in his lap.

It apparently pleased and surprised him. He took it, hefted it, tested its balance, pulled the mechanism to test its sliding parts. It was almost new, well oiled, free from the fungus that so quickly deteriorates guns in the muggy, Borneo climate. He showed his delight with a laugh that was the laugh of a pleased child. He laid the gun on the floor and twisted a ring from one of his fingers. It flashed—a diamond!

"My esteemed guest!" he said, giving it to Dougherty.

The diamond was a beauty, a canary yellow, a drop of crystal fire. It weighed at least three carats. It was not cut as a brilliant, but after the manner of the ancients, with unequal facets so it would perhaps lose a quarter part of its weight in being modernized, but for all that, Dougherty had a good $1,500 advantage in the exchange, and it did his American heart good.

"You put me to shame."

"My guest." The raja pointed to the tea with fingers that were still a blaze of yellow. He wore diamonds on every finger, and even on his thumbs; they were stacked so high with rings that it was difficult for him to close his hands at all—yellows, Borneo yellows, the most famous yellows in the world.

Dougherty said, "Your kindness makes my gift seem poor."

"I have many diamonds, but this single Luger."

He knew something of guns, Dougherty was thinking, or he would not have recognized the make so quickly in the dimness.

The raja went on, "After your kindness, the kindness of the *besar raja* of the last season, I am left much in your debt."

The *besar raja* would of course be Van Hoog. Dougherty listened with gratification. The raja had assumed that he was Van Hoog's representative without asking—but no, he had learned from the warriors who had escorted them from the other village.

He took the bowl of tea that the man had poured for him. He tasted it; it was scalding hot. It burned his tongue, leaving it with a scaly feel like the hide of a fish, but the raja seemed immune to heat and drank the tea with long, sucking gulps. While the tea lasted they took turns at expressing polite amenities.

At last Dougherty said, "I have not been here before."

The raja lifted his eyebrows.

"It was not the *besar raja's* intent to send me. But the caravan was ready and none to guide it, so as a great favor, to show my esteem for the *besar raja,* I volunteered."

The raja kept nodding and smiling.

"And so," concluded Dougherty, "for your favors, many thanks."

A boy of twelve or thirteen came in and sat down with chin cupped in hand, watching intently. The boy was such a striking image of the raja, Dougherty knew he could be no one but his son. In a minute a girl entered, slightly older than the boy, and seated herself in almost the identical position. She was beautiful, of an almost English cast of features, but very dark eyed, and dark skinned. She, too, was dressed in trousers, black cotton, held by a drawstring pulled tight above her small, round abdomen, but instead of the loose blouse of the men, she wore stiff brocade in a vest without fastenings in the front, open and revealing her breasts, perfect globes, without loss of modesty.

"Your children," said Dougherty, "they are very beautiful."

Neither the boy nor girl made any sign of hearing, but the raja was pleased.

Dougherty then said very casually, "I would be greatly in your debt if you furnished me with a guide." The man apparently failed to understand, so Dougherty made the sign of travel and said, *"pandu."*

"You have none of your own?" the raja asked incredulously. "You do not know the way, and still you have reached us without a guide?"

"A difficult journey!" said Dougherty. "If you please, my raja! I would be greatly in your debt."

There seemed to be a slight hardening of his manner, the first touch of suspicion. Or perhaps Dougherty was watching him too closely.

The raja was nodding, showing his teeth in a sharp smile. "Anything. A—" he paused hunting for words. "Guide! A guide, as you say, to Pasar Kaki Langit. At dawn."

Dougherty remembered the need for water and was told to send his boys for what they needed from the well,

the springs being dry from the long drought. He left repeating the words, "Pasar Kaki Langit." Translated they meant something like "trading center at the rim of the world," and so he assumed that this, his ultimate destination, would be still a long travel, perhaps to one of the mountain passes which separate North Borneo from the vast jungle country of the central island.

With night, a chill settled in from the mountains. Half a dozen times Dougherty arose to tramp around and feel for warmth in the burned-out fire. Brother John stood watch with the Bren still in his care, after him it was Tedaro, then Hip Ying, and finally himself.

He stood in the early-morning chill with a cigarette unlighted in his lips, and glancing at the girl's bed, he saw that her eyes were open, looking at him.

"Sleep awhile," he said.

Instead she got from beneath the poor grass cover and walked to him barefoot.

"Put on your shoes," he said. "Do you want to catch the *ku-rap?*"

She sat down and pulled on her boots. Some of the natives, hearing voices and suffering from cold, started to get up, too.

"Why wait?" she asked, glancing around.

He marveled at her, so soft and slight, and still she never tired.

"Aye," he said, "we will shove off."

He looked for the guides which had been promised him, thinking there would be a delay in getting them from the Kampong, but three young Sookah fellows were crouched by the wall, waiting. He signaled to them, his boys commenced preparing breakfast, and in an hour, with dawn only a grayness on the horizon, they started.

With the three Sookah natives leading, they climbed slowly along successive hill slopes, coming out again and again for a view of the Kampong until it was a tiny oval far below, hazy through mountain mists. Then they walked across a wide, gentle bulge of land with tall mountains to right and left, and the country commenced to slope in the other direction, toward the south, toward central Borneo. This was the pass, gentler than he had ever expected, and closer. After a mile or two of travel, amid spotty timber, they came to a settlement.

Chapter Fifteen

IT WAS NOT truly a settlement; it had no permanence. There were no women or children in the single street. The buildings were crude shelters, good only for protection against the sun, insufficient to turn the rains of the monsoon season so close upon them. Here and there tents had been pitched—the patchwork tents of Arabs, the wall tents of Americans or Europeans. The largest tent, circular in shape, had a flagpole out front and a bit of cloth drooping from it—a cloth bearing a single Chinese character indicating the place was a gambling dump.

Pasar Kaki Langit! It was a disappointment. It bore no resemblance to one's dream of Cathay.

The word of their arrival had gone around, and men came straggling into view to stare. Men, only men. They caught sight of Nana and raised a shout that brought more men, and they commenced to pass coarse jokes, speaking every language of West and East. Then Dougherty moved ahead with the sub-machine gun in the bend of his right arm and they stopped, not cowed, merely waiting in morose silence.

Dougherty stopped at a distance of fifteen or twenty feet. He looked them all over, up and down and across, and looked at the camp, and then back at them. Some of them were white or had been white once, some were of Arab blood, some were Chinese, and there were Islanders of all varieties. They were dressed in the best and the worst, in filthy rags and in silks. In one respect they were alike—not one of them was without a pistol, though some carried two, a heavy Mauser, a Colt or a Nagant perhaps, with a smaller gun in belt or sash; and one man, a huge, swarthy fellow with tiny gold rings in his ears, carried pistols at each hip while a two-foot scimitar was thrust in his belt. Horses of the small, Island breed grazed in some rope-fenced meadows below the camp, so it was evident that they had arrived by some route other than the suspension bridge, no doubt from the other direction, south from the Mahakam lowlands.

When Dougherty was about to speak, a spare, tall man came hobbling, favoring a bandaged foot, saying, "What ho, now, what have we here?" in a brassy, slum-Sydney Australian accent. He stopped, pretending to be surprised at seeing the girl, although he had been standing at some distance, finishing a cigarette, watching as they came down the trail. "A lady, eh? Well, now, that's a bit of a switch, and all for the good, too." He turned to the others, grinning, spreading his very long fingers. "What's wrong with you? Haven't you doffed your toppers? Can't you see we got a lady come amongst us?"

"A lady, aye!" said Dougherty, pronouncing the words for their full effect, "Madame Van Hoog!"

It did have its effect. The grin became an incredulous smirk on the face of the Australian.

"You don't say! No offense, ma'am. None intended."

Dougherty asked, "Are you the leader here?"

"Me? Well, I wouldn't say that any man is leader here." He gave the men a rueful lop-sided scrutiny as they kept pushing in, feasting their eyes on Nana. "Tell you how it is; some years we hold an election. Every bullet is one vote, and him that walks out on his pins is the winner. It's not so 'igh and sanctified as the democracy that the Yanks chirp about, but it serves good enough considering the moral stamp of the men we get here." And he laughed with a high, giggly "He-he-he!" slapping the legs of his pants, hobbling around on his poor foot and a half, clasping his middle until there was no laughter left.

"Ho-ho! Ho-ho!" roared a big, dull-looking man with the face of a Tartar, his eyes on Nana's legs where her thighs were revealed through her brush-shredded shorts. "Last one alive gets woman! Ho-ho!"

Dougherty turned the Tommy gun in his hands and aimed it at the Tartar's heart. The Tartar stood straight but without altering the stubborn savagery of his face.

"Now, Mac!" the Aussie said to Dougherty. "None of that, Mac. Not yet. Not till the trade's over." And to the Tartar, "You, Nebo, keep your mouth shut. She's the big fellow's wife, do you hear? The *big fellow's wife*." And back to Dougherty again, this time quietly from the side of his mouth, "Some of the boys are high-spirited. And what you could trade *her* off for! If she wasn't the big fellow's wife, that is. *If*, I say, she wasn't."

A heavy, bearded, dirty old man with loose trousers

thrust in the tops of bush boots and his blouse making him look like a Russian, came up and asked, "Why don't send guns? Give me guns, plenty guns, I have middle Borneo in hip pocket. Then I will show big fellow some business. Diamonds, yes, and gold, and maybe world's greatest copper deposit."

The old man was deranged, and they started to shout at him in different languages, asking him to tell one thing or another about his travels, and he shouted back at them, his voice raised to a furious quaver. While this was going on, a Laut mulatto approached Dougherty with a large, smoky, brownish diamond saying, "*Hoe-veel? Hoe-veel?*"

Before Dougherty could answer the tall Australian shouldered him out of the way and said, "I'm doing the talking, and I'll talk diamonds all in good time."

They made camp, choosing the site of a ruined shelter at the extreme upper end of the settlement, a place well removed from the other camps, somewhat secluded among trees where the banks of a dry watercourse afforded a measure of protection. Brother John, who had patiently lugged the Bren throughout all the long miles, guarding its mechanism against the damp of the river and the dry grit of the hills, built himself a small nest and mounted it, pointing it in the general direction of the large tent. All this was to Dougherty's satisfaction. He wished he had his Luger back, but it had served a necessary purpose, and the Thompson he carried was still plenty of gun. He smiled, hand in his pocket, feeling the ring with its large yellow diamond, thinking Aye, that was good, too. With vigilance, he expected no trouble.

He saw Nana seated on the ground and came over beside her. They both watched in silence for a while as the boys repaired a shelter that had been abandoned since the season before.

"We may need it," he said, pointing toward the sky. "The rains come earlier to the mountains."

"What did he tell you?" she asked, meaning the Australian.

"You heard him. Diamonds. You were right about that. What else do you know?"

She sat smiling to herself, knees up and head bowed, studying the toes of her boots.

"Tell me!" he said.

"Tell you what?"

"Why wouldn't you trust me with the facts? Why did you get me here keeping the diamonds a secret?"

"I have already listened to you on the subject of communism."

"Aye, the Red swine, and I still would not deal with them. What do they have to do with it?"

"I'm only guessing, putting things together—"

"Aye?"

"Who would pay the highest prices for diamonds?"

He knew—the U.S.S.R. Yes, he could catch on, even him! Even he got ideas through his skull after he'd been kicked by them enough times. The embargo against industrial stones was no new thing. He remembered the trade that had flourished along the coast of Africa when the British were trying to keep industrial stones from going to the Nazis during the war. Now it was taking place all over again, the search of one suspicious ship after another in the middle- and South-African ports, and still the traffic in diamonds continued.

He sat beside her, constructing in his mind the full geometry of Van Hoog's plan. Opium first of all—opium not from India as he had supposed, or from Iran, but farther north, from Turkestan, in that sub-tropical country rising from the Caspian Sea, opium from the U.S.S.R. The Russians raised it to trade for the things they needed most. Well, perhaps uranium was the thing needed *most*, but how could uranium be smuggled out through the clicking Geiger counters of the port inspectors? But diamonds! What system had ever been devised to stop the smuggling of diamonds? So the diamonds went to the U.S.S.R., and the opium southward over this pass, through this camp, to factories outside the pale of all law, (protected by the petty rajas who held sway over interior Borneo) factories which processed the crude stuff to make heroin, and then on again, to the coast where it would make its next journey, aboard tramp steamers, even planes, to America for American dollars, and these back again for the next pyramiding in the money markets of the East. And all starting with those ugly black balls of opium. A challenge to Wuch'ang's control of the money markets? Indeed a challenge! He was thinking

that one hundred thousand dollars was a piker's pay for the service he was rendering.

"What are you going to do here?" she asked.

"Trade and get out."

She laughed. "You who would not trade with the Reds! Or in opium!"

"We must squander the farthing to save the pound. We must make this small transaction in order to wipe out the whole, vile traffic."

She froze a little. She lifted her head and looked at him with her intent, dark eyes. "Are you really that noble?" Then she smiled and said, "But you are American. I became acquainted with Americans in Bangkok. They are just like the Chinese from Shanghai. To either the dollar is—"

"Anything for a dollar? You are wrong. Americans are like all other races, the good, the bad, the in between! Aye, chiefly those, the in between. Thus man. I will do my good deed but I am a man of ingenuity. A man of ingenuity can betimes save his conscience while yet enlarging his pocketbook."

"Bravo!" she cried, slapping her hands together. "Three cheers for America!"

"Don't jump at conclusions," he said, slightly irked, getting to his feet. "Not a diamond I'm able to acquire will ever find its way into the industries of the U.S.S.R., if indeed that is where these are intended."

Perhaps a million in stones was here for the taking. He would not quibble over the price. A little less or a little more, a fortune either way. He would sell them in Hong Kong, in Manila. Enough was enough. It gave him a tingling in the hands to think that the fortune, the great fortune he had always dreamed of, was here almost in his grasp. But he would go carefully; he would not muff it. And as yet he had seen only the one diamond, the smoky in the hand of the mulatto.

It darkened, with a veil of clouds covering the early stars. A light burned in the large tent. From one edge of the camp he could see men crouched in a circle playing some variety of *wu chi*. He could hear the voice of the Chinese gambling master calling the numbers.

"Halt!" said the Muhat boy standing sentry, and Dougherty moved over to see who it was.

A little, black bush boy, wearing trousers and a red

fez, had slunk into camp and was motioning toward Dougherty to follow.

"Who sent you?" Dougherty asked.

"Vik!" He said it over and over before Dougherty understood that Vik was a man's name. It was the Australian.

Dougherty considered long before going. Yesterday, he thought grimly, it would not have been so bad to be shot, now, however, with the fortune of his dreams just beyond the tips of his fingers—! But, the sub-machine gun ready, he went with him.

The boy, following a shadowy route, led Dougherty to a tent.

The tent was heavy brown canvas, so thickly covered by waterproofing it was opaque, with only here and there a pinpoint of candlelight showing through. The boy crouched by the rear flap, listened, and when no sound came, signaled by scratching his fingernails across the material.

"Yeka?" came the twang of the Aussie's voice. "Well, all right, stop that damn scratching and show him in."

The flap was tied on the inside. "Open up!" said Dougherty quietly.

"Oh, yes. A minute, now." His voice came from just beyond the canvas. He put the light out. "All right, Mac, here you come."

On hands and knees, pushing the gun in front of him, Dougherty moved through the opening. The tent was black as the depths of a mine, warm, filled with the odor of the grease lamp or candle that had just been extinguished. He remained on one knee, the Thompson ready, while Vik went hunting and muttering through the dark, tying the flap back down, circling him, locating the light. He struck a match and lighted a thick, native candle.

"Greetings!" Vik said, looking very hollow-faced with the light striking him from below. "You came heeled, didn't you? Well, you needn't. Mind you, I'm not saying I blame you, but you needn't. I'm here for my own good, and yours, and they're one and the same. So let's talk friendly."

"Aye," said Dougherty, but he kept possession of the gun.

He looked around the tent. Vik had been sitting

in a folding canvas chair reading. His book, a paperback novel, greasy with thickened pages from long carrying, lay face open on the ground. It was an American mystery story.

Seeing his eyes on the book, Vik said, "Oh, I got a nose for good reading. Always have. Back in Sydney when I was a sprout, my old man used to beat me out of bed every morning with a razor strap; you see I'd laid abed 'af the night reading and wouldn't want to get up and go to work at the docks in the morning. He was a drunk, my old man, and the only exercise he got was beating me out of bed to earn a living when I was twelve. That and lifting a glass and moving his jaw when he said 'Here's how.' Learned that from the Yank sailors. That and 'Here's mud in your eye.' Gawd, but he thought he was the clever one when he learned that. A regular damned Oscar Wilde, ready with the right word at the right moment. One night I was comin' home, carrying a book to read, and there he was, lying face down in a little ditch. Ordinarily it'd been all right. him sleeping there, but this time there'd been rain. there was a foot of water in it, and the old man had drowned. By Gawd, I read my whole book that night and slept late as I pleased, and when I showed up at the dock I'd lost me job, and it was that that started me to wandering the globe over, as the poets say. I been up and down and across these Islands as far as hell-whereever and back again, but I never lost my taste for good reading."

"Aye," said Dougherty.

"Have a chair."

Dougherty sat down in the camp chair. "Luxury!"

"Well, yes. I like me little comforts. Might as well introduce myself, I'm Vik. Joseph Henry Vik, but I generally go by the name of Kid Vik. Used to be a fighter. middleweight. like old Bob Fitzsimmons, only I had a glass jaw. Now, what's your handle?" Seeing Dougherty's hesitation, he cried, "Oh, come! I gave it to you straight, now you reciprocate. You're a Yank, I can tell by your accent. You been sleeping with the old man's wife, and I don't blame you one damned bit. I'm broad-minded about such—"

"Sir, said Dougherty, getting to his feet, "I perceive you would like to have your neck snapped."

"O. K., chappie, don't go off the vinegar end. I only been trying to pass a pleasant time of day as the English-speakin' should when they meet. I been honest, like I said. I ain't bragged about who I am or where I come from. I could make it uneasy for you here, I could have from the start, because I knew damn well that you and the sweet trick were a long way outside of old Hoog's blessing, but I didn't say a word."

"Why?"

"Eh?"

"Why didn't you?"

"Like I said, the English-speakin', we got to stand shoulder to shoulder or the blacks will—"

"And you would like to cut the pie your way?"

Vik fired back, his face coloring in the candlelight, making it look almost black. "Well, what if I would? Don't pull none of that Yank nobility on me, I'm sick of listening to it. Out to reform the world, you Yanks, and give malted milks and coke to the bushmen! I've listened to *that* garbage all I'm going to."

Dougherty smiled, thinking that Vik and Nana had ideas concerning Americans which were quite compatible.

Vik blew and spat and forked his thin hair back and said, "I'm interested in money. Just like Yanks, I'm interested in money, but I ain't sneaking around behind a sham of nobility. Money! I'm sick of taking all the risks and doing the work just to fill somebody else's jingle-bob. Three cents of a dollar value for my diamonds, that's what I got here last time with the big Dutchman himself on the job. Couldn't take 'em to the coast because the Chinks have closed shop. Oh, they're in this close and comfortable, Van Hoog and the Chinks. Well, last season I vowed it was going to end. Next season I'll kill him, that's what I said. And I would have too, and his Moslems be damned; I had it all planned how I'd do it, and here *you* showed up. So I says, 'Hold back, Vik, here's an Englishman, or a Yank, next thing to it, I'll talk business with him and maybe we'll both get a slice. That's the words I said. Because, Mac, I'm going to get mine, I'm going to enjoy a bit of life now, while I still got a gut that works right before it's corroded full of leaks by dysentery or dried like a vanilla bean from blackwater fever."

It was a long speech, and delivered in the warm tent, it left him shining from sweat and winded.

"What's your proposition?"

"Now, that's more like! You admit you're not here with the Dutchman's blessing, and I'll admit I got a proposition. I'll tell you what it is. You give me that cargo of *chandu* and I'll give you the longest, heaviest bag of industrial diamonds ever stole from the placer mines of Borneo."

"Yours?"

"What difference does that make? They're diamonds."

"I need to know."

"Why?"

"I would like to know how fast I have to leave this den of rogues after the trade is completed."

This pleased Vik, and he laughed. Standing over the candle he seemed all chin, cheekbones, and eyeballs. "Listen, Mac, between you and me, you better leave quick because that's what I figure on doing. And never come back. You see, I formed sort of a cartel, telling the lads I'd see they weren't robbed like other years."

"The diamonds, I'll see them now."

Vik thought about it. With a sudden hitch, he unholstered his revolver. He didn't point it, but he was ready to point it, and to pull the trigger, too, if Dougherty tried to bring around the Thompson.

"No, don't get up. There's no threat about this. I'm just playing safe in case you might want to get the pebbles for nothing. Me dead and you with the diamonds and the *chandu*, both. So sit still and remember I'm perfectly capable of scattering your guts all over that tent wall, but I'm not threatening."

Holding the gun, an Enfield, in one hand and groping with the other, he came up from some heaped duffel with a leather bag which he tossed in Dougherty's lap.

"Open it up. Go ahead, dump 'em in your hand, but be damn sure none of 'em happens to get stuck between your fingers."

The bag was heavy, and it gave a grating, rattling sound when Dougherty pulled the drawstrings to open it. It contained rough, brown-to-black industrial diamonds. He removed one and tried it for hardness on a fragment of whisky bottle he saw on the floor. It was diamond. He hefted the sack and estimated its value on

the no-questions-asked market at slightly better than a hundred thousand dollars.

"A sampling?" asked Dougherty, keeping his voice steady.

"A good sampling, Mac, but there might be more *if* you got a tonnage of *chandu*, that is. I'm making a straight value for value deal."

"Of course," said Dougherty. "But as a matter of simple fact, my cargo does far exceed this in value."

"Good! I say even trade, value for value. What I mean is that going black-cargo price for black-cargo price, *chandu* for diamonds, that's only fair."

"Agreed." He stood up. Casually, he had brought the muzzle of the Thompson around and caught Vik off guard with the Enfield down. "Drop it!"

Vik had the expression of a man shot in the stomach. He let the Enfield fall and Dougherty kicked it to a far corner of the tent. He laughed. "You see, I could kill you and take them, but I haven't. Now do we trust one another?"

Vik took a deep breath and his color returned. "You gave me a bit of a scare."

"Aye. Are you coming?"

"Later. Best not to be seen together. Don't let 'em see you leaving."

"Aye," said Dougherty, crawling crabwise through the tent opening. "A hearty aye indeed."

Chapter Sixteen

DOUGHERTY WALKED THROUGH the night, the moon just rising, reflecting from horizontal banks of clouds. On the air was a faint piney fragrance of distant mountains, but around him he could smell the camp, the stink of men and animals. It was quiet, with talk coming indistinctly from the big tent. At camp one of the Muhat boys walked back and forth, proud to have in his possession the other Thompson gun.

"Sahib!" he said, lowering the gun and saluting.

Dougherty asked him if anyone had left camp, and receiving a negative answer, he went on to talk to Nana.

"What did he want?" she asked.

"I think we're ready to do business. With luck we can make our trade tonight and break camp by dawn. It mightn't be healthy to be around here tomorrow. The rogue! And I'd like to get back over the bridge."

"Diamonds?"

"Of course."

"Many?"

"Fifteen hundred carats, at eighty dollars the carat—"

"A thousand the carat!"

"From some Red agent? No, girl. I do not trade with the Reds. Before that, I would dump them all in the sea."

"Then I have seen an American who holds something higher than money!"

She still did not believe him. He took hold of her hands and said seriously, "You make a mistake to judge all Americans by us flotsam who are cast up in the Orient."

He glanced around, sensing that someone was behind him. It was Hip Ying. Hip Ying moved on, stony-faced, but he had been standing there, listening. Often he would look around and see the Chinese just standing, blank-faced, apparently not looking, not listening, not doing anything.

"I'll be rid of him," Dougherty said to himself. "I'll be rid of them all, some day soon."

He walked around the camp. The boys had made a circle of logs and stones forming a boundary, a limit for patroling. He stooped inside the shadow of the hut to inspect the cargo of opium. Old Tedaro was there, asleep, but he awakened when Dougherty came near.

"I keep watch," Tedaro said. "Keep watch all-time."

"Good boy. I'll reward you handsomely at the end of the journey. But I'll take over. Go to bed."

"Bed right here."

"No, go away."

Tedaro quickly obeyed him, leaving him alone.

He unfastened the bundles for another inspection of the opium. The stuff had made a long journey, and now it would go on, and on, farther than it had ever gone before. The cargo was undisturbed. He put it back together again. The opium left his hands with a sticky, unclean feeling. He rubbed his hands on his pants and assured himself for the dozenth time that this was different, that *this* cargo would not advance the trade, that instead it would help destroy it. Yes, next week, next month, he would have a complete blueprint of the traffic to place before Sung, and through him, before the International Narcotics Committee. And the diamonds — not for Stalin but for Dougherty. That was desirable too, a triumph any way you looked at it.

He went back outside. It made him uneasy: the fact that Vik quite obviously planned to double-cross those who were foolish enough to entrust their stones to him. The moon was rising, covering the country with its light, laying black shadows in the hollows. Time passed, perhaps an hour. It seemed longer when one waited. Once he heard voices raised in dispute at the big tent, but they quieted, the game went on. Then he heard a whisper of movement.

It stopped, and Dougherty thought perphaps it was his imagination playing on his taut nerves, but he looked and saw the sentry with his gun up, ready to challenge.

"Quiet," said Dougherty.

"Hi, Mac!" came Vik's voice from the outer shadows.

"Come along—alone."

Vik limped into view. "That's a relief. Wouldn't trust that black fellow with his hackety-kack gun. Nothing they'd rather do than make raw meat out of a white man."

"Who's with you?"

"Few of my boys."

"How many?"

"Six. Seven, counting old Churchill. Named him after the Prime Minister. You see, when I first run across him he was wearing a black bowler and he'd picked up a long black cigar somebody had thrown away, and I said, 'Churchill,' said I, 'you've lost some weight.' Skinny as a hat tree, this Churchill. In Batavia, this was, but Churchill's not Javanese. He's Torres-Straits native. black as—"

"Tell them to stay back."

"Gun shy?"

"Do you blame me?"

"No, not in this camp. You swallow a shilling and there's men in this camp'd gut you for it. I'm telling you the truth, Mac, if integrity was horse manure, this camp couldn't grow a radish. Now, let's have a look at the *chandu*."

He led Vik inside the shelter and lit matches while he went through the opium, examining each ball of it, hefting it, testing a ball here and there with a long pin to detect its center quality, computing weights and adding as he went along.

"Three-fifty," he said when he was through.

Dougherty threw the last of a dozen matches away and said, "What?"

"I say three hundred fifty pounds."

"No, four hundred forty-five."

"We'll split the difference. Call it four hundred even."

"No, four hundred forty-five, damn you."

"All right, I won't quibble."

"Now the diamonds."

"You think I got 'em with me? I'm not that dumb. No, I came to your camp to see the *chandu*, you come along and see the pebbles. That's equity."

"Aye."

He went with him. His natives, brown men ugly from face scarring, were crouched in the shadow of bushes.

"Meet Churchill," Vik said, thumbing at a skinny old native. "Churchill, let's have 'em."

Churchill brought the bag that Dougherty had already seen in the tent.

"Same ones," said Vik. "See for yourself."

"You'll get no two hundred thousand dollars worth of *chandu* for this."

"A hundred thousand of *chandu, if* I get out with it!" Vik squawked, and lowered his voice to a whisper. Fiercely he said, "You don't need to hand me none of that sharp Yankee practice, because—"

"Black-market price for black-market price, that was the agreement."

"How many stones you expecting?" Vik asked.

"Triple this!"

They argued more and Dougherty, saying, "Go to hell, sir!" started back for the camp. He returned at Vik's entreaty. After more dickering, Vik produced other bags until a sudden, genuine fury in the man told Dougherty he had them all.

Then they agreed, and both were happy in the belief that they had got the better of the bargain.

Dougherty found light in the shelter to examine the stones; he nodded his satisfaction, and Vik called his boys, who silently carried the *chandu* away.

Dougherty spent some time appraising the weight of industrial diamonds contained in the four bags. He judged the total at slightly better than 3,000 carats. At legal prices, it was true that Vik had obtained the advantage, but Dougherty knew of some South American speculators who would pay at a rate of eighty dollars a carat, or slightly more for these, for they were Borneos, not African, and contrary to popular belief, all diamonds did not have a hardness of 10 on the scale, the South African stones being more like 9.9 while the Borneos, the toughest in the world, were rated at 10.2

He gloated over them for a while, enjoying the grating feel of the bags as he squeezed and bent them in his hands. Then, looking for a place of concealment, he buried them deeply in the spare bags of mealie-meal.

He was satisfied with that, too. He would tell no one, least of all the natives. And a native would not fight harder for his life than for his food supply. After all, it so often amounted to the same thing.

He then went through camp, arousing the sleepers, saying it was time to begin the homeward journey.

He stood with gun ready and watched the village for trouble. Vik's departure had gone unnoticed. The gambling went on with shadow movements against the tent

and a voice chanting the numbers as they came. Feeling that something was amiss, his boys hurried, exchanging whispers as they worked. Packing was easier now, with the *chandu* gone.

Nana said. "Let me see the diamonds. I heard you—"

"Later."

"Why are we leaving at night?"

"Vik—I think he double-crossed half of them. They entrusted their diamonds to him. And when—"

"Oh, of course."

Brother John came up to say that the three Sookah guides had disappeared.

"To hell with them. We don't need them now," Dougherty said, but their defection gave him an added uneasiness.

"The bridge!" he muttered to himself. "Once we're beyond the bridge—"

They departed silently. They traveled through the hours of darkness and dawn and hot morning. Their pace was faster now, with the weight of *chandu* behind, and the trail now downhill. They paused to rest beneath a clump of shorea trees, eating the few nuts that were still to be found, killing more of their hunger with handfuls of dry meal from the bags. It was then very hot, but they traveled on, hunting shade where it could be found, here through trees, or again through savanna grass higher than a man's head. In late afternoon they again sighted the Kampong.

It was far off, shimmering through the late heat wave, and Dougherty had called a halt with the idea of circling it, but a drum was beating, its impulse sounding strongly despite the distance, and he could see the shine on native spears as warriors in two columns came to meet them. He had no choice but to be escorted to the village.

They stopped at their old campsite, and Dougherty, leaving his gun behind, set out alone for the gate.

"How long?" Nana called after him.

"I don't know. Keep ready to move. Especially those Muhat boys. They've gone through hell for us. If anyone gets clear, I want it to be them." And he thought walking toward the gate, trying not to show his fatigue in his stride, Them and their mealie-meal. A quarter-million dollars worth of mealie-meal!

Chapter Seventeen

THE SUN HAD just sunk from sight, leaving a red-purple flame on the air, misty violet with the signs of approaching rains. The Kampong was in shadow; as on his previous visit women were preparing the evening meal and the smoke of cookfires gave everything a bluish cast. Families squatting in their huts kept doing whatever they were doing, eating, preparing food, gossiping, and they did not even glance out as he passed. The longhouse was dark. A single guard stood by the raja's house. The escorting warriors had disappeared. He climbed to the veranda, and like the other time, the raja spoke, telling him to enter.

He lifted the curtain. It was very dim and his eyes were still blinded by the sunset. He stood just inside the door. Although unable to see, he had the strong impression that someone aside from the raja was in the room.

He wanted to back away from the door, he wished desperately that he had provided himself with a hidden gun. He checked his impulse to run. He remained where he was, broad and tall under the low ceiling, and sight came to him.

A man in whites sat in a chair across the room from him, and with a blow of recognition, he knew it was Van Hoog.

Van Hoog had been waiting for that moment to triumph in Dougherty's surprise. He relished it. He laughed. It was a satisfied laugh, deep in his thick throat. He sat forward a trifle, the seat too low for one of his size, his legs bent, his trousers drawn tautly over his thick thighs, his abdomen, big without fat, thrust forward between his knees, his huge shoulders rounded, his bullet-shaped head thrust forward. In his hands, crossed in front of his abdomen, was a big, blue automatic—a Belgian Browning.

"Vell, unarmed!" he said. "Goot, Goot. *Ja*, dot iss goot!" He spoke with the thick accent showing the state of his temper. He was sweating, although the room was not hot. His shirt under the armpits was transparent

from sweat, sweat glistened in drops all over his big face. His topee lay on the floor, and sweat stuck his hair flat to his scalp.

"Aye," said Dougherty with bitterness, "you have me, don't you?"

"By the hair, by the throat. I could kill you this second. Or I could take out your eyeballs, and run quills through your inner ears, and chop off your fingers, and when I was finished you'd even forget your name, and then I wouldn't have to kill you at all, I could take you home mit me, and I could sit and laugh at you while I drank mine schnapps. *Ja,* it would please me so. I have not decided. Whatever it is, rest assured, Mynheer Yankee, that men will remember you and say 'what a foolish thing to double-deal Van Hoog!' "

"It might interest you," said Dougherty, "to know that I have been sent here by the International Commission on Narcotic Drugs. You are already a suspect. If I should not return—"

"Hol You were sent by the Chinese, by Wuch'ang. You were to be paid one hundred thousand dollars, a pittance, you were in mine warehouse. You found opium. I know all."

The raja was seated cross-legged on the floor before a table no more than eight inches high on which were tea bowls. Water bubbled over some lumps of charcoal in the little brick stove. He lifted the pot of boiling water, his fingers a streak of yellow fire from the diamonds. He did everything very correctly, just exactly so, smiling all the while, making tea, and his smile made Dougherty think of a waiting mamba. At his waist was a dagger; he carried no gun. Dougherty noticed all that while listening to the chortling triumph of Van Hoog.

The raja said, "Tea?" in his sardonically polite Oriental manner.

"Go ahead!" said Van Hoog, "and I will tell you more while you refresh yourself."

"Aye," said Dougherty.

The tea was ready for him. He leaned and picked up a bowl. In lifting it with thumb and forefinger he held his small finger stiffly out, and with it he hooked the handle of the brass waterpot and upset its scalding contents across the table, into the raja's lap.

The man sprang to his feet with a reflex of pain, and

Dougherty instantly had him by the front of his blouse. He lifted him to his feet, snapped him so his turban flew off, twisted him around, dragged him back close to his body, a shield against Van Hoog's gun while he was getting the dagger.

The raja had been jerked senseless for a moment, neck almost out of joint, then he commenced to fight with the blind fury of a captured chicken, flapping his arms, trying to kick, bite, and writhe free, but Dougherty had him.

He held him and swung him this way and that, backing toward the door, giving Van Hoog no chance to use the gun. When the raja stopped kicking he used the pause to press the needle-sharp point against his throat. He kept backing to the door and forced his head back and back. The raja had no thought of struggle now. He was rigid. The muscles and tendons stood out in his neck, his eyes were distended, he breathed with difficulty, and the sound of it was the loudest thing in the room.

It had all happened quickly. Van Hoog had the Browning aimed but he dared not shoot. Each time he tried to get in the clear, Dougherty had swung the hapless raja between them. And now he was in the doorway.

"Pull the trigger!" Dougherty taunted him. "Kill us both!"

Van Hoog cursed him in Dutch. His helplessness turned to fury. His rage made him momentarily lose control of himself. His face looked loose and sag-jawed: it looked purple in the dim light, spittle ran down the corners of his mouth, the gun was gripped so tensely it jumped in his hand as if some unseen force were jerking it, no matter with what strength he tried to hold it still, and Dougherty was alarmed that it might explode by accident.

"Stand where you are!" Dougherty whispered. "Yes, stand there or I'll skewer him with this dagger. I'll leave a dead man here between us, and ask for the judgment of these tribesmen outside who they will burn at the stake—you, or I, or both of us."

He backed to the veranda. Men were all along the street now, Van Hoog's Moslems who had been concealed in the shadows of huts, the Sookah warriors in regalia, paint, and copper ornaments, armed with guns and spears. A cry went up when they glimpsed the raja helpless on the point of the dagger.

Dougherty whispered in his ear, "Tell them to kill me. Why don't you tell them to kill me? They could. and my last act would be to drive this dagger all the way from your throat to the underside of your skull."

With an effort the raja screamed, "Stand back, stand back!" in his native dialect, and he kept up his high-pitched screaming while Dougherty took him in a swift half trot down the street.

"Break camp!" he shouted through the gate to his staring boys. "Go, go!"

He had passed the longhouse safely. Soon he was at the open gate. He heard Nana scream. Her voice came from close by, he did not know where. He turned, swinging his captive, and realized that Hip Ying was behind him, his automatic drawn.

It did not occur to him that the Chinese intended the gun for him. He somehow imagined that he was trying to help. He turned, removing the dagger from the *raja's* throat. Hip Ying, slightly crouched, had the automatic aimed at his heart.

"Free him all way!" said Hip Ying.

"Eh?"

"Free him!" screamed Hip Ying.

He did. He stepped back, eyes on the gun muzzle. Nana had been coming at a run, close to the wall. She tried to get at the gun from behind, but the Chinese was too quick for her. He stepped aside and swung the barrel with a chopping wrist motion, clipping her on the skull, doing it so quickly it still gave Dougherty no chance.

"Sorry, I would kill you."

"You sold out to him!" hissed Dougherty.

"Stand still."

Men streamed through the gate now, surrounding them. The raja had recovered his voice and his fury. He screamed orders. With a spear against his abdomen and another at the small of his back, Dougherty stood very straight, not daring to move. A dancing, wide-eyed Sookah hopped around swinging a scimitar horizontally, barely missing the top of Dougherty's head with each wild slice.

He was facing somewhat away from the gate and toward his camp. His boys were retreating, but slowly, reluctantly, not knowing what they should do.

"Go, go!" he shouted in the Muhat dialect. "Pick up your food and go."

Van Hoog, at a lumbering run, came through the gate. He pushed men out of his way and drew up to look at Hip Ying and Nana. Nana was still on the ground. She was on hands and knees. Her scalp showed a slick streak of blood through dark hair, where the gun had struck her.

"So," he said. "Welcome home. So you have come back to your husband."

"Stay away from me."

She sounded girlish and terrified. Dougherty had never heard her sound like that, he had never imagined her feeling like that, and it cut him. But there was nothing he could do. Nothing.

She tried to get up and her hair tangled in dry-baked clods on the ground. She looked very small and pitiful, crouched on the ground, her hair strung out, some in tangles and some pulled straight against the clods, her eyes looking up through her hair at Van Hoog, who stood solidly, legs spread and hands on hips, looking at her.

"You struck her mit gun?" he said to Hip Ying.

"Yes!"

"You struck her too hard." When the Chinese said nothing to that, Van Hoog stepped toward him and bellowed. "You hear me what I say, you struck her too hard!"

"She came behind me!" Hip Ying cried almost in a scream.

"She deserves beating, *ja*. She deserves to be whipped." He struck his chest with his fists and and forearm. "And she will be whipped, but by me. You hear that, all of you—by me." He said to her. "Get up."

He did not say it angrily. He sounded almost sad. He was patient like a parent who had too long borne with an errant child. "Here, your hair is tangled. Look at you, in rags. Your legs bleeding. Welts on your body. And all, everything, all the luxury you left behind. Like *that*, why? Why?"

She got to her feet. She was sobbing, but from fatigue and defeat rather than fear.

"No, that will do no good," Van Hoog said. "Here, quit it. Not in front of these natives." He waited for her to get control of herself. "Come, I have a place for you in the raja's house."

He sent her away with two of his Moslem guards and turned his attention to Dougherty, who still stood stiff against the needle points of spears. With a sour smile he said, "So, everything *in the bag* like Yankees say, eh? Mine wife, mine cargo, diamonds, all. You thought yourself on the highway of victory, and suddenly, *pft!*, you are in quicksand." He stopped smiling. "Where are the diamonds?"

"Diamonds!" Dougherty manufactured a bitter laugh. "Ask those thieving ones at the trade village about diamonds. Ask that squint-eyed Australian, Kid Vik, about the diamonds. And ask him about the opium, too!"

"What do you mean?"

Dougherty raised his voice, "What do you think I mean?"

"You mean they robbed you?"

"Aye."

"You are a liar."

"They robbed us and drove us from camp. We were lucky to get away with our lives."

Van Hoog motioned outward, saying, "Find the dunnage. Bring it here. Find all their dunnage. Hers, too. Dump it on the ground. Go through it."

Apparently it never occurred to him that the diamonds could be in the possession of the escaping boys. He stood while their poor belongings were searched. He then walked to Dougherty and cried, "Where?" He pronounced the word for the second time and as he did he drove his fist in a short, savage uppercut to Dougherty's groin.

It doubled him over and dropped him to his knees. He was on his knees, arms wrapped around his middle, unable to see, unable to breathe. He knew that Van Hoog was readying another blow but he could do nothing about it. Van Hoog stepped back and kicked him in the head. It knocked him on his back. He struggled blindly to get up while Van Hoog, grunting and puffing, jumped on him and kicked him in the face until it was a mass of bleeding flesh and a merciful black wave of unconsciousness spread over him.

Chapter Eighteen

DOUGHERTY KNEW HE was being carried; he could feel the movements of men walking, he could hear the harsh accents of the native language. Every movement pained him. Pain was like a cold sword down his spinal column; it throbbed in his nose and across his battered face; it was like an area of confined pressure inside his skull. He did not care especially whether he lived or died. He merely wanted to lie still, he wanted to be laid away somewhere in the darkness, he wanted quiet, he wanted to be left alone. He wanted to be laid away and forgotten by all men, forever.

He was dumped on a hard floor. He did not move. He lay on his face and slept.

After what seemed like the passage of hours, with thirst, nightmare, and pain, slowly he awakened. Under him were planks, native hewn. There was a ruddy, amber light around him. He could hear voices. One of them sounded familiar. It was a sharp, Cockney voice—Jaske's voice. He seemed to be dreaming. He thought he was back aboard the Sally Scott. It came to him that he was on the Sally, that everything had been a dream, that he had been sleeping, and now it was time for him to set out for Van Hoog's plantation. But the floor was strange for the Sally. What would such native planks be doing on the Sally?

He rolled over, lifting his big body in the process. It took all his effort. His strength failed him, and he fell so the back of his head struck the floor. It made a loud clomp; the voices stopped and men got up to look down on him. He could see them shadowing the light—Jaske and Hip Ying and others farther away.

"Well, damn, he's waking up," Jaske said. "You got to give it to the Yank, 'e can take it. 'E's got plenty of the old vinegar. Gawd! I've seen 'im go through hell that'd kill three average men and come through ready to drink, fight, and chase women till daylight. Hey, Frisco!"

Dougherty knew it was not a dream. He knew that Jaske had double-crossed him, that he had gone to Van

Hoog, that he had told him of their plans in case of failure at the compound.

"Hey, Frisco! Wake up! This is the Mark Hopkins Hotel in good old San Francisco, and you left a call for ten o'clock, remember? By Gawd, Frisco, you won't make it in time to feel that early fog in your face. Hey!" With his toe, he nudged Dougherty in the ribs. "Hey, how about your eggs! Want 'em two minutes in a glass? Or 'ow about poached in Sherry wine?"

Dougherty did not answer, but his mind was in operation. As long as I'm unconscious, he thought, they won't attempt to torture me for the hiding place of the diamonds.

With his head slightly to one side, his eyes open the merest slits, he could see the room, lighted by a smoky grease lamp. Van Hoog was seated at a table playing solitaire. Hip Ying stood smoking a cigarette, his face showing no more interest or emotion than one would expect from a dried fig. Beyond them, by the door, stood the deaf-mute, Bodoh, a Beretta sub-machine gun in his hands, a heavy machete and a Mauser pistol at his waist, and half a dozen long clips of cartridges in a strap carrier around his neck, a total weight of armaments that probably exceeded thirty pounds, but Bodoh was the lad who could carry them.

"Is he awake?" asked Van Hoog. He did not glance to see. His face looked sour and bloated. He played one card on another and licked his thumb each time he took a fresh one from the pack.

"No," said Jaske, "but I'll give him a dose of this."

He walked somewhere, came back, and Dougherty felt the shock of water over his head and shoulders, two or three gallons, drenching him.

"Yank, it's your old friend Jaske!"

He muttered, "Yes, Jaske." He intended to make it sound thick, but there was no need of pretense. He could scarcely pronounce consonants with his swollen lips. "Yes, Jaske, let's go ashore."

"Eh? Ashore? Damn, he thinks we're aboard the boat! Well, I got a surprise for you, Yank, we're already ashore."

"What did you do with it, Jaske? I'll kill you, you British swine, bring it to me."

"What are you talking about?"

"The envelope. I have to put it in the post."

"What envelope? W'at the hell's he think he's talking about?"

"Where's Eddie?"

"Eddie who? Listen to 'im. He's raving nuts."

Dougherty said anything that came to his tongue. "Eddie, get the *anggor. Mena padang kapal terbang?*"

"Now what?"

Hip Ying said, "He is inquiring for the airport."

Van Hoog said, "Try him for fever."

Jaske hunkered and passed a hand over Dougherty's face. He lifted his head by the hair. "Bring the lamp!" Hip Ying did, and Jaske said, "He's got a touch of it, all right. Either that or it's the beating he took. Gawd! Look at that purple face. You did give 'im a pummeling!"

Van Hoog cursed and threw the cards down. He got up and bumped the make-shift table out of his way, and stood pulling his sweat-stuck pants down from his thighs. "It happened before. I slapped him so little and he was down two days mit fever. Get some water. Mix soda. Fill him up and keep him full. Aspirin, too. Quinine and sulfa."

"All at once?" asked Jaske. "Say, this'll be a new day for medicine!"

The Chinese said, "I would suggest—" and waited for Van Hoog's attention.

Van Hoog turned and glowered at him. "*Ja?*"

"I would suggest we prop his teeth open and give him water."

"Couple gallon, eh?"

"Yes."

"The old water cure? I have never seen it done. Good torture, eh? But no. I can't take a chance. The fever, damn the fever." He laughed bitterly. "How many men do you find having their lives *prolonged* by malaria, eh? Well, in the East, one sees anything."

Van Hoog sat back down. He picked up the cards, almost losing the deck in his big hand. He shuffled, twisting the cards, squeezing them, ramming them together, but doing it with a certain deftness, too. Then, wetting his thumb each time as before, he dealt his solitaire game and played. Although his eyes seemed to be always on the cards, Dougherty sensed he did not miss a thing, not a twitch or a sound.

Dougherty breathed rapidly, but not too rapidly, not overdoing it, playing the part of a man with the first touch of fever. Minutes passed. Jaske was like a caged jackal, sitting, hopping up every few minutes, circling the room, sitting down again. The Chinese was quiet and frozen-faced. Van Hoog played his interminable solitaire. It was raining outside, the first after weeks of drought, and the smell of it came through the woven walls of the house. The rain increased from a patter and became a steady drizzle. It found its way through the dry thatch and dripped to the floor in half a dozen places.

"Damn the luck!" Jaske said, muttering about the monsoon.

Van Hoog said, "You will not mind monsoon mit diamonds in your pocket!"

Somewhere in the village a drum had commenced to beat, it was joined by the singing screech of a silk-stringed instrument, some sort of a devil's fiddle, and later by the voices of men in a rising and falling chant, music more of Asia than the islands. They were engaged in an ancient ceremony to greet the rain gods. The chant went on and on. That, and the rain, and the snapping of Van Hoog's cards—it seemed endless.

At last Van Hoog got to his feet, flung the deck down, and walked over to kick Dougherty in the ribs. "Wake up, damn you, wake up!"

He thrust a toe under him and with a heave and grunt, rolled him over on his face. "Wake up!" He rolled him again and Dougherty lifted himself to an elbow and looked around in a wild semblance of delirium.

"Wake up! Where did you hide them?"

"What?"

"The diamonds!" Van Hoog bellowed.

Dougherty did not answer. He knew that his one poor chance of escaping torture and death was to feign delirium and wait.

"Look, don't you know your old friend, Van Hoog? Wake up, I will talk about Boswell's Johnson mit you. Look, your friends, Captain Jaske and Hip Ying. Nothing will happen to you with Hip Ying to guard you!" Van Hoog commenced to laugh. He laughed with his legs set wide, his hands on his hips. "Hol ho!" he roared, "see how the secret society watches over you. Wuch'ang! Dr. Sung in Singapore, Wu in Bandjermasin, Chin Tseng in

Tempail How could anything go wrong with such men at your side? To kill watchmen in my warehouse! Save your life! So did he do, no? You fool, I could have had you killed then. But Dr. Sung thought it necessary to get you far from the commission, from Singapore."

Hip Ying cried, "About that, no talk. About Dr. Sung, no talk."

"Eh?"

"Please to keep quiet about it." Hip Ying had lost some of his composure. He stood straight with his arms at his sides and his hands opening and closing.

"Eh, so!" The smile had vanished from Van Hoog's face as if it had never been there. "So now you think you can tell me how to do in mine own country. The power of Dr. Sung has gone far. Across the oceans and now to the last mountain of Borneo, eh? I am now hireling? No longer in independent business mit Wuch'ang, making them much money, now they say do this, do that. You have a string on me like all the rest."

"He is pretending his fever. He will hear every word. What if he should report it all to the U.N. Commission—"

Van Hoog struck him. He struck him a chopping, side-hand blow, just under the ear. The Chinese dropped as though he'd been hit by a club. Van Hoog pounced over him, one foot on both sides of his body, seized him by the front of his shirt, lifted him limp with arms dangling, got his neck in the bend of his right arm, and drawing his gun, hit him three times, bringing the automatic's heavy barrel down with all his savage strength. It cracked his skull. Van Hoog still held him, watching for a sign of life.

"You killed him!" whispered Jaske. "You cracked his skull like a coconut."

"*Ja.*" He let Hip Ying fall. He struck the floor on his face and lay with a twisty, disjointed look, with legs and arms bent around in grotesque positions.

"You see," said Van Hoog, pulling a few bits of hair from the forward sight of his gun, "No man orders me. Not even Wuch'ang orders me. *He* found it out. Others will find it out. In good time, Dr. Sung in Singapore will find that out." He winked at Jaske. "You were smart to line up with me. I can use a man like you, mit ship, knowledge of these waters. I will make you rich, you work with me, take my orders."

He signaled to Bodoh, held out his hands, and Bodoh

dipped a shell of water and poured it over them. Van Hoog stood waving his hands dry and wiping them on his shirt, looking down on the body of Hip Ying with distaste. "One man less," he muttered. "A killer. A cobra killer. Knife-in-the-dark killer. I did not trust him." He again took notice of Dougherty. He shouted, "Hear me, where did you hide them, eh? *Where*, before I have you hung by the thumbs and the skin torn off your back with a whip! Where?"

"You going to give 'im the works?" asked Jaske.

"Get him the soda. Damn him and his fever!"

Chapter Nineteen

DOUGHERTY HAD BEEN given a quart of liquid, warm, bitter from soda and quinine. He was carried somewhere and dumped. He resolved to remain awake, gather his strength, watch for a chance to escape, but he slept in spite of himself. He awakened lying on his back, his arms roped wide apart to a bed that was actually only a broad bench of flattened poles. A light shone in slits and points through the cribwork walls of the room. He was alone.

He lay still. His wrists were held by rope, his arms pulled wide, bound down to the sides of the bench. The room was small and square. The cribwork walls were ironwood poles, pegged and mortised at the ends. The ceiling overhead was the same. When he turned his head he could see the door—ironwood posts set in timbers top and bottom, and bound solid with hide wrappings, unhinged, apparently lifted into place at considerable effort. It was a prison room.

He lay, not fighting the bonds, sorting out the facts of his predicament. The girl was a prisoner somewhere, perhaps Brother John, too. He was quite certain the remainder had fled. It could be they were already over the bridge—with the diamonds. That could be good or bad. That would be very fine indeed if he escaped, or bad if he faced torture.

It was still not morning, but morning could not be far away. He had slept twice, or had he? That first awakening scene, with Van Hoog playing solitaire, Jaske standing over him, ending in the death of Hip Ying, had a nightmare quality. He was not quite certain it had ever happened.

Hip Ying, damn him! He first thought Hip Ying had simply changed loyalties from Dr. Sung to the Dutchman. But Van Hoog's words made him see that he had been made a fool of from the start. The diamond trade of the coast had ceased because it was diverted *here*. He often thought it peculiar that Wuch'ang was not more alarmed. He had inquired about it at the jungle port of Tempai,

and the Chinese, Chin Tseng, had tried to have him killed. He now had no doubt that the attempt had been made after a wireless from Dr. Sung. Then he had gone straight on to Singapore and Dr. Sung himself. Sung could easily have had him killed in Singapore, but only with the danger of making his problem worse. What if Dougherty had other partners more important than himself? And so Sung had sent him to the warehouse, let him find the opium, even provided Hip Ying with a convenient corpse, some innocent coolie, he supposed, and "saved his life." That had seemed peculiar at the time, too. Just the dead man, his silent fall, not even a clatter from the machete that was supposed to have fallen from his hand. He should have examined the body. Perhaps the "watchman" had been dead for hours.

And so Dr. Sung had sent him on, getting him away from Singapore where he could be an embarrassment, giving him the chance of getting his confederates together, if confederates he had, giving Sung a chance to capture them all. His action at Tengah, though, had been a surprise; he had lived through boldness, and he still lived.

Captain Jaske, he wondered, where did Jaske fit in?

A man had come up to the door and was looking through the peephole, cutting the lamplight. Dougherty lay perfectly still, eyes barely open, breathing easily. The man turned away and prowled back the way he had come. He could see his shadow through the cribbing of the walls. He was huge and hunched and had a close-coupled gun in his hands. Bodoh!

Outside it was still raining. There was a slight drip of water here and there through the roof, leaks that would stop when the dry thatch had soaked a little. The drum and serinda instrument had stopped. The compound was perfectly quiet. The house was quiet. Only the barefoot shuffle of Bodoh, the slight *click-click* of the cartridges he carried, the tinkle of copper ornaments. And the rain.

He tested the ropes that held him. His legs were free, allowing him to shift the weight of his body, to brace himself. Slowly, with one elbow down at as great an angle as the ropes would allow, one heel braced in a crack between the poles of the bench, the other foot under him, he applied his strength. He was a powerful man, and with

the utmost limit of that power he strained up and up, with the poles beneath him squeaking as they bent. The ropes cut his wrists and stopped the circulation. Then with a sharp, rolling twist he tried for the force that would break him free. But the ropes held, the poles of the bench held, and he fell back blind and dizzy from exhaustion, the bench making a loud thud beneath him.

Bodoh came running to peer through the door.

Dougherty lay in his old position, very still, eyes closed. Deaf-and-dumb! he was thinking. Aye, that had been a lie, the man could hear all right, or how had he been aware of the thud the pole made? Then it occurred to him that Bodoh might have felt rather than heard the thud, for the deaf man's sense of feeling is often very acute.

Long minutes passed. At last Bodoh moved away. He made his beat and looked again. Dougherty did not move. Bodoh had assumed his old regularity, his dreary prowl of the passageway, his return to glance through the door, and back again.

Dougherty counted slowly, timing him. Eighty counts, return, five looking, and eighty again. Eighty, seventy-eight, eighty-one. He tried wearing the bonds against one of the poles. The poles were smooth, the grass rope was tightly twisted and very hard; it would take a week of such abrasion, and Dougherty had no such week at his disposal.

His pulling, though, had given his right wrist an inch or two of play. Rain fell in a *spat-spat* at half-second intervals. It touched his arm with a fine, cool spray. The rain soaking the grass rope would take some of the dry-season shrink from it. He got his arm bent beneath the drip. Water commenced running along his skin, held by surface tension; it ran beneath the rope and off his fingertips. Slowly, very slowly, the rope soaked its fill. He could sense no loosening, in fact it seemed harder and more unyielding than before, but now he found he could make a fist without rope pressure producing a constricting pain to the muscles of his wrist. By slow maneuvering, by twisting back and forth, he caused his wrist to turn beneath the wrappings. The grass rope, cured with natural glues and resins, grew to have a slippery feel as if covered by soap.

He still counted Bodoh's walk. He worked on the rope

until the count reached seventy: he had from eight to twelve more before Bodoh appeared at the peephole, there Bodoh would stay for five or six counts; then he would walk off again, giving Dougherty another minute with the rope.

At last he decided that the rope was loose enough. He waited for Bodoh to go, counted twenty so he would be as far away as possible. He closed his fist, knotted the muscles of his wrist to make it as large as possible, to stretch the rope just previous to his second-of-maximum try. He turned on the bench as he had on his first test, then he relaxed his fist suddenly and pulled with all his bodily strength, rolling his wrist beneath the slick wrappings, and the one hand slipped free.

The rest would be easy. He lay back, still forcing himself to count. *Squeak-squeak*, that was Bodoh coming back. The light dimming was Bodoh looking inside. And it brightened as he moved away again.

Dougherty, sitting, quickly unfastened the rope from his left hand. He did it quicker than he had expected. Twenty counts and he was free. He coiled the rope and moved silently to the door. He tied one end of the rope to a beam near the peephole, then he crouched, out of sight, waiting for Bodoh to return and take his look and see that he was gone from the bench.

He felt rather than heard the returning footsteps. His shadow passed along the wall. Then the man was very close, only a few inches away; he had an impression of his dark, oily skin through one of the narrow openings; he could even smell his skin oil, and the banana-oil odor of the solvent used in cleaning the sub-machine gun.

Bodoh looked and started to turn away as usual, and suddenly he realized that his prisoner was gone from the bench. It was the second—the fifth of a second—that Dougherty was timed for.

He stood, reached through the door as far as he could, caught the big brown man by the back of his neck, and jerked him forward.

Bodoh drew in his breath with a sharp, screaming gasp. He collided with the door, and there he would have twisted himself free, but Dougherty made a quick circle around his neck with the rope, let go with his left arm, and pulled back.

Bodoh fought with the strength of terror. He was a

big man, shorter than Dougherty, but just as heavy.

The rope burned through Dougherty's fingers. He almost lost it. He managed to get a double wrap around his right wrist. He came back with greater power, dragging Bodoh off his feet, the side of his head pulled tight against the peephole. Dougherty set his feet against the door to hold him. He climbed the door, applying more and more pressure, until he was almost in a standing position, held by his grip on the rope.

Bodoh tore at the rope. He tore off his fingernails and tore the skin from his fingers. His feet were almost off the floor. His toes beat a frenzied dance on the floor as his struggles lost purpose and became futile. Dougherty held and held. He held him after the need for it was passed. Something like terror kept him holding the rope for a long time after Bodoh was still, dangling on the noose, a dead weight.

At last he got his wits about him and relaxed his hold. The man's weight, falling, almost pulled the rope from his hands. He recovered it in time to prevent the noise of him falling. Then he put his weight to the door, praying it would not be fastened in some manner on the outside.

It was very heavy, and swinging it outward, lifting, dragging it across the floor he had to move Bodoh's weight as well. He slid through and found himself in a passageway.

This was the longhouse, as he had expected. This section which some of the coastal tribes used as a communal shelter, was divided into many squarish chambers. At the other end, closer to the gate, would be the main gallery, a ceremonial room.

The lamp was a grease dip burning in a stone bowl. Its light faded out in the shadows at both ends of the corridor, but apparently no one was there except himself. And Bodoh. He laughed through his teeth. Aye but Bodoh did not count!

The gun. It was a Beretta, one of those sweet little Italian sub-machine guns. He leaned the gun against the wall. On one knee, forcing himself not to hurry, forcing himself to prevent lost movements of undue haste, he unfastened the belt that held Bodoh's Mauser pistol and machete. He buckled it on. He decided not to use the ammunition carrier. He did not wish to constrict the movement of his shoulders. He removed the cartridges

and clips and distributed them through his pockets. He stood then—the weight of cartridges almost pulling his pants off.

Now he felt good. Now he felt fine. Now he was a man again. The weight of guns, ammunition and machete was the best, most gratifying weight in the world.

"All right, you," Dougherty said. "Now let's have a talk, you dirty toad-faced son of a bitch!"

Chapter Twenty

DOUGHERTY WALKED DOWN the passage; he reached the big gallery which took up more than half of the longhouse. The gallery was lighted by a spirit lamp which shone upward on clusters of human heads each suspended by a thong through the top of the skull. The heads were heat dried and tanned, the skin turned to parchment, pulled tight, a shiny, varnished brown. The heads seemed to watch him with shriveled eyes and with the black eye sockets. Dougherty did not mind. He stood quietly with the heads watching him, and listened. He went on, through a doorway, to the platform.

He lowered himself over the edge, hung by one elbow, dropped. It was a good distance to the ground. He hit harder than he expected, his feet went out from under him in the slick new mud, and he sprawled to the ground.

He lay without moving. Had someone heard him? He listened for running feet. No, nothing. He tried his legs to see if he had escaped injury. He was all right. He should have used the ladder. He deserved a broken leg for not using the ladder. He got up. Through rain there was the first faint hint of dawn. He found deeper shadow beneath the platform. He walked, dodging pillars, pillars without plan, a forest of pillars. And he saw someone.

He stood quite still, not breathing, until the man had passed. It was one of the tall Moslems that Van Hoog had brought from his plantation.

Dougherty followed in the same direction. He saw the sentry stop and wait and have a few words with another who patrolled the far side. Dougherty then crossed among huts toward the raja's house.

A light glowed somewhere inside it. Again he saw sentries, but they were not alert. There were three of them grouped together with a piece of attap over their heads to turn the rain: a cigarette glowed, lighting one face after another as it was passed from hand to hand. On the cool, damp air came the odor of native tobacco mixed with gunja.

They did not see him. He crouched and got beneath

the house. The piles supporting it were about three feet high. Between the piles were angled cross-braces, which he had to climb over and crawl under. Here and there small, wiry vines had grown forming such a solid tangle he was forced to use the machete.

Midway under the house he paused; crouched, head and shoulders touching the floor, he listened. There were no voices, but he heard the slight creak of someone moving about.

He reached the far side of the house. He stood awhile to get the ache from his back and look for sentries. He climbed to the veranda. The light was here visible, but more faintly, through doors covered by drapes.

He chose a door at random; he stepped inside.

The house smelled of spices, of native food, of a peculiar civet and floral perfume. It seemed very warm after rainy coolness.

He moved along the wall, feeling with his left hand, the Beretta in his right. He stopped at an inside doorway draped with thin, ragged silk. Through a tear in the silk he could see a small section of the lighted room, the one he was familiar with, the one in which he had met Van Hoog and the raja the evening before.

The evening before! It seemed impossible. It seemed that days, a week even, had passed. But it had been only the night before.

Light came from a brass lamp hanging by means of three chains from a ceiling beam. The room seemed to be empty. Then he sensed someone's presence behind him and spun to feel the pressure of a gun in his abdomen.

"Hst! Frisco!" The man whispered, and only six or eight inches away was the jackal face of Captain Jaske.

"You swine! You—"

"Oh, no! You save it up for later, Yank-me-lad. It's true I'm 'ere, and I brought *'im* 'ere, but a man'll do many a thing that's against his conscience when a gorilla like Van Hoog has 'im by the throat! But I'm not harming you tonight, Frisco. No, it's Jaske that's saving your rotten life!"

"Eh?" He still watched the revolver, but he felt sufficiently reassured to take a deep, deep breath.

"That gun's so you'd listen, Frisco. You ain't the listenin' kind, so—"

"Where is he?"

"Where's who? Van Hoog?"

"Yes."

They talked in something less than whispers, each speaking from the side of his mouth to the other's ear. Jaske said, "I ain't sure. Wish I was. Damn 'im, 'e's always in the wrong place. But if you ain't careful—"

"It would please me to run into him. I'm through running from him. I—"

"That's foolish, Yank. Kill 'im you might. Yes, you might be just the one to turn the trick, but then what? What happens to you and me and *her*? And poor Brother John?"

Dougherty waited.

"We got to get out of 'ere, Yank."

"Where is she?"

"'*Ere*."

"And John?"

"At the longhouse. Damn that Dutchman—"

"I came from the longhouse."

"Maybe, but 'e's there, and the deaf and dumb keeping watch. Say, how'd you—"

Dougherty cursed through his teeth. Of course, there had been a second prisoner. That was the reason for Bodoh's extended beat. He should have guessed. He should have looked.

"W'at he did to poor John!" whispered Jaske.

"What *did* he?"

"Hung 'im by the thumbs, worked 'is back over with a bull-hide whip. Then 'e put weights on 'is feet to give 'im a stretching."

"Where is *she*? Nana?"

"Now, Yank, use your head. The girl is safe enough. We can always—"

Dougherty seized his arm and twisted with a force that made Jaske's knees buckle. "Take me!"

"Quit it, you strong-arm son of a—"

"Go!"

"You're not ten steps from her this second, only a wall's in the way. He has her under lock and key. And maybe 'e's there, himself. And those killin' Moslems—"

"You Cockney swine, you'd leave her here?"

With Dougherty holding him, Jaske led him through draperies through another room, down a dark hall, and

to a tiny slot of a door. His ear to the door, Dougherty listened.

There was no actual sound, but there was *something*. It was a movement, the vibration of bare feet on the trembly, suspended floor of the house, a tread, the rhythm of a heavy man.

"Him!" whispered Jaske, and he was frightened.

"No. A native. He's barefoot."

He was coming along the passage they themselves had just traveled. He was almost on them. He had stopped. He gave off an odor of dampness and tobacco. He was at the door. He listened and seemed to be about ready to turn away. He realized that something was amiss. Something told Dougherty that he had stiffened and was listening. He muttered a word, a question, an exclamation of surprise, and Dougherty, shouldered Jaske out of his way, laid the Beretta across his skull.

The native went down with a gasp that was like a whispered scream. He hit the floor on elbows and knees, a thud that shook the house. A second man shouted in alarm. Someone was running. Guardsmen suddenly were everywhere.

"Let's get the hell out of 'ere!" said Jaske.

"Go, damn you!"

Dougherty got the fallen man away from the door. The door was barred, whether on the inside or outside he did not take time to tell.

"Nana!" he said.

"Yes, yes!"

He drew back and hit the door shoulder first, smashing it free of its hinges.

"Where are you?"

"Here," she said, from the floor. The door had struck her, knocking her down.

"Can you walk?" he asked, lifting her.

"Yes." He kept holding her while she tried to push free. "Give me a gun."

He pushed the Mauser into her hands. They were in the dark passage. He kept hold of her trying to locate the way he had come. Everything seemed to be different now. He could see nothing. The lamp was out. He hit a turning in the passage that should not have been there. He found a doorway. He caught a strong, gassy odor—the odor of the lamp just extinguished. He knew then where

they were. The raja's parlor—they had entered it from another door. He tripped and went to one knee over the brick stove. He found the door, the veranda.

"Over the side!" he said and dropped down where he reached to help her. "Muddy."

A man ran past without looking at them. Someone had lighted a torch. Men were on the move all across the Kampong. Dawn was a glow that silhouetted the tops of the houses but left the ground still in darkness.

"Where?" asked Nana as they ran.

"The longhouse." And he explained. "Brother John."

They climbed a ladder. He was ready with the Beretta to cut down anyone who appeared, but the sentries seemed to have departed. Drawn away to the raja's. He led her running through the gallery with its spirit flame, its browned heads, to the smaller rooms.

"John!" he called, feeling from one door to the next.

"Here, tuan."

He said, "Thank God," and found the door. It was not even closed. He groped saying, "Keep talking, damn it, how can I find you?"

He felt his pockets. His semi-dry match container was still there. He struck a light. After long darkness the chemical flare seemed brilliant. He saw the big native hung from a ceiling beam by his thumbs, his toes barely touching the floor.

With one high slice of the machete Dougherty cut him down. He got beneath him and caught him, abdomen over his shoulder, saved him from the floor.

"Can you make your legs work?"

"I try, tuan. I pray. God will help me to walk."

"Aye, pray and try. I'll get you out, though. I'll carry you, man."

John at least half supported himself, and it helped. They reached the platform. A ladder was near. It proved to be a problem, getting him to the ground. Dougherty did not know himself how it was accomplished. He had lost Nana. He turned, still helping John, and spoke her name. "Here," she said beside him. "Straight for the gate," he said.

A native shouted. A spear hissed the night. He realized that Nana was about to fire in return, and shouted, "No!" but it was too late. She hit the native with bullet lead knocking him flat on his back with arms outflung.

The flame and impact of the pistol shot started all of them that way. They ran through a rain of spears and bullets, but it was brief, and the shadows of huts hid them again. To the gate, now, and it was open.

"Frisco!" Jaske said.

"Ha! Of course you made it!"

"You and me both, Frisco. We come through!" Falling in behind him Jaske said between breaths, "Wouldn't it be a joke, Frisco me lad, if you was to make it back to San Francisco after all and then break your neck climbing off a cable car?"

Chapter Twenty-one

THEY TOOK THE footpath across goat pastures, through clumps of wild almonds. They were almost half a mile away before their escape was noticed when a rifle, at hopeless range, sent four arching bullets after them.

"Walk! Just walk!" Dougherty kept saying. "Don't play yourselves out. We have a long travel."

Dawn grew up through rain, the horizon brightening, the sky above still a solid gray. Clouds hid the mountains, and in the form of a very wet fog descended around the path they followed. Hours later, among little, hummocky hills a pursuing group caught up with them, and they were briefly endangered by some long-range shooting, but mist vapors, like shreds of gray crepe, came between them, and they moved on.

A state of near exhaustion forced them to pause. Despite the rain, it was hot. The humidity was stifling. Dougherty paused to speak to Nana, and then went on to give his attention to Brother John.

"How are your hands?" he asked.

He knew without asking. The poor devil had been bound by the thumbs, lifted off the floor, and his thumbs disjointed. The tendons had slowly stretched, and now the sockets were swollen so his hands looked like big knobs at the ends of his arms, and he could not bend a single finger.

"The swine!" Dougherty kept saying, "the dirty swine!"

They dared not rest long. In fifteen minutes they were up going again, trying to reach the bridge before a vanguard of pursuit cut them off.

Jaske for the tenth time said, "Yank, you ought to tell where the diamonds are hid. There's this to consider—you might get a slug in your heart and another of us mightn't, and 'im that comes through should get the swag. It'll do no good under ground or in some hollow tree for another bloke to find."

Finally Dougherty said, "They're already over the suspension bridge, bound for the coast."

And Brother John, "They are hidden in the mealie-meal of the Muhats."

"You knew!" Dougherty said. "And you didn't tell."

"I knew. I did not tell. Would I be alive if I told?"

"Aye, and would I be alive? But you have guts, lad."

"Yipes!" cried Jaske. "You sent it out right under his bloomin' bloody nose. Now all we 'ave to do is catch up with 'im before—"

"So save your breath! Save it for the hard going!"

They sighted the Sookah village and circled it. There was jungle and the footpath burrowing through it. The footing was still dry in all but a few places, sheltered by the vast sponge of leaves overhead. They came out on one little clearing after another, and now there was a distant roar—the river.

"What a place for an ambush!" Jaske said between breaths as he walked. "That'd be Van Hoog! Give it to you within your grasp, and then snatch it away. A poet, he is! The devil's poet. The ideas for torture that fellow has got! You should have heard what he 'ad in mind for you, Dougherty. None of those thumb pulls, either. Things like sewing up your rear end and giving you a quarter pound of epsom salt." Jaske laughed with a wheezing sound. "Ow! but I've seen the day when I'd like doing that to you myself!"

They went on more carefully, through thorn and tree clumps, watching for ambush. The Canyon was a great rift in the earth's crust, sundering the country as though placed there by the single swing of a mighty ax.

A mist, rising from the river, mixed with the mist of rain. The bridge hung perfectly still without a tremble, its ropes dark after soaking their fill of rain, the wooden footway slick shiny beneath the gray overcast.

A lone brown man popped monkey-like into view near the landing and peered at them.

"Safe enough!" Jaske said with a long exhalation.

"Aye, perhaps."

"Nobody's put his weight on that bridge for 'arf an hour or it'd still be in sway. I know, I've seen those things before, I was across one on Halmahera one time, and—"

Dougherty was not listening. He went on to talk to the native. He asked about Van Hoog and his Moslems, about his own Muhat boys, hearing with relief that the latter had been across and not the other. He paid the

price the man asked without dickering and motioned for the others to start across, and as he lifted his hand a bullet cut the ground, raising a streak of mud and slimy, rotten wood, chased by the crack of explosion.

Men had emerged from the jungle, and one of them was Van Hoog.

"Go, go!" said Dougherty with the Beretta up.

Jaske went first on the bridge, running, reaching ahead of him for the guide ropes as his rhythm sent the span swinging perilously. A bullet struck the footway, leaving one of the slats broken throughout its length, fragments dangling. Jaske kept on, hunched forward. He skidded and almost fell. A second bullet whipped close by and he lay on his stomach, fearing to rise, clinging with both arms wrapped around the footway.

Dougherty cursed him for a coward, the worst kind of a coward, the kind who would lie on his belly and die rather than fight for his life. But Jaske was up again, running the bridge.

Dougherty found cover on the ground. It was too shallow and he crawled, using his elbows to snake himself forward.

He lay still, gun in front of him, head barely visible, waiting, letting Van Hoog and his men get close enough. Then he opened fire, full automatic, the stream of bullets mowing down the first line of men, all but Van Hoog who remained on his feet, those ridiculous feet too small for the rest of his body—Van Hoog with his rolling, top-heavy run.

Van Hoog dived forward among moss-covered rocks. His voice came sharply, ordering his men, part in one direction, part in the other, and Dougherty, hearing the commands, knew where to turn the next blast of the Beretta.

He held the trigger down exploding a long clip of forty. He jerked the clip, rammed another home, and fired that dry like the first.

There was no sign of anyone now—only the dead and wounded. He turned his attention to the bridge. Jaske was all the way across; Brother John and Nana were beyond the midpoint, starting up the steep climb. Using the last of his cartridges he raked the jungle blindly. Then he got up and started for the bridge with a bent-over, weaving run.

Van Hoog came up with his Belgian automatic in his hand, and fired. He got to his feet. He came on by himself, all his men had left him. Head down, not bothering to push aside the limbs and vines that separated him from his quarry, he came. He fired twice more, and yet again after Dougherty was out of sight, over the rim of the bank, on the landing of the swinging footbridge.

Then both men were on the bridge. Van Hoog had fired the gun dry. He threw it away and drew his machete. He kept coming. The fact that a few sniping bullets passed him from Jaske and Nana did not in the least deter him. Dougherty merely walked. He walked and watched. He had no more cartridges for the Beretta. It was useless weight. He flung it away. He drew his own machete. He was thinking that he could reach the far side and there, with four swings of the big knife, cut the bridge and drop Van Hoog into the torrent. He backed along the bridge, watching Van Hoog.

Aye! he reconsidered bitterly, cut the bridge and have those Negritos fill him with their poisoned arrows!

He waited with his back to the shore as Van Hoog came on, spraddle-legged like an orang, grabbing repeatedly for the left-hand guide rope, the machete in his right.

His shirt was torn revealing his pink skin. His mouth was open, his eyes were fixed on Dougherty. His face had a loose, flabby expression compounded of his basic savagery. For the first time in Dougherty's life, pure hate made him want to kill a man.

He stood and Van Hoog kept coming. Neither increasing nor diminishing his speed, Van Hoog covered the last steps separating them. He came as if he expected to trample Dougherty underfoot. And making the last stride he swung the machete in a horizontal arc putting all the power of his body into it.

Had it struck it might well have cut Dougherty in half, for the knife was razor sharp with a weight of four or five pounds, but Dougherty fell back, landed half lying on the narrow, slatted walk, and there he felt the power of the knife pass over him. Then he rose, doubled over, coming forward, his own knife up, trying to catch the big man at an unbalanced moment and disembowel him.

Van Hoog proved too quick. Instinctively realizing that his momentum would not let him turn back, he powered

on, letting go of the rope, dropping his hand, seizing Dougherty's wrist, falling across him, trying to use his weight to force the point of the knife down. But Dougherty was steeled against him. They fought, lying full length on the narrow footway, each with the knife wrist of the other.

They were locked without advantage. That lasted ten or twelve seconds. Then Van Hoog's position and superior weight commenced to assert itself. Slowly, with the application of terrific strength, he was able to turn Dougherty's knife a degree, and another, and another. His own knife remained the same, pointed downward at Dougherty's abdomen. The advantage was very slow, but very certain.

Van Hoog was wheezing through his nose. He was whispering *"Ja! Ja!* Soon you die. Soon. Soon!"

Dougherty knew that the balance had turned against him. He put a final ounce of effort into forcing his knife hand back to its original position, and as it reached that point, as Van Hoog was for an instant distracted, forced to counter it with an extra effort of his own, Dougherty let his legs relax, twisted from under him, and rolled off the edge of the bridge.

For a second he dangled over the abyss, and Van Hoog tried to drop him. It had happened too quickly, and with a swing through space Dougherty hooked the bridge with his legs and was back again.

He had to grab to pull himself to safety. He lost his machete in doing so. Van Hoog, turning, tried to pin him through the chest. Dougherty, rolled. He used his weight and Van Hoog's weight to carry the machete down; its blade ended between the slats. He rolled over and their combined weights twisted the handle from Van Hoog's grasp.

Van Hoog lunged from his knees trying to get his hands on Dougherty's throat, and Dougherty, standing, stunned him with a right and left to the face.

Weaponless, they fought.

There was no room for maneuvering. Dougherty retreated, using his reach, smashing Van Hoog as the man came after him.

His fists turned Van Hoog's face into a bloody mass. He mashed his nose, hammered his lips until his teeth hung through. Blood ran across Van Hoog's chest, soak-

ing the front of his pants. But he would not go down and he would not stop.

Dougherty had ceased making any attempt to guard himself. He held a guide rope with his left hand and used it to bring more power into his right. But Van Hoog kept coming. The bridge steepened. At a point where Dougherty half turned to gain footing, he lunged.

Dougherty had anticipated it and planned his response. He fell. He twisted in falling, struck the footway on his back and shoulders, doubled his knees under his chin. It was timed exactly. He let his feet straighten with the suddenness of released springs. He caught Van Hoog in the belly. He drove him backward. The big man struck one of the guide ropes with his right shoulder. It turned him half way around. He screamed and wild-eyed made a grab for the footway. He got it and saved himself, and Dougherty holding the guide rope behind him with both arms, followed. He drove the heel and sole of his heavy, water-soaked bush boot to Van Hoog's face. Van Hoog still held. Dougherty braced himself and drove the boot again and again and again until he was blind from exertion and the Dutchman's face was a shapeless pulp. One could scarcely have told where his nose, and eyes and mouth were, but still he held.

He held until Dougherty turned his attention to his fingers and trampled and kicked them free of their grasp on the slats and wrappings of the footway.

Then they gave way. Van Hoog made one more desperate grab. He got hold of the projecting ends of two slats and dug his fingernails; for a few seconds the strength of his hands held his great weight despite the rain-slick wood, and the thirty or forty degree angle at which it dipped.

But the fingers slipped. First a quarter inch at a time, and then more rapidly. His fingernails were torn to shreds. The fingers gave way, and he fell.

Relieved of his weight, the bridge snapped up and swung almost twisting back on itself. Dougherty held. His eyes closed, feeling drunk and giddy, he held and held until the movement was an easy rocking.

He opened his eyes. Somehow he still expected Van Hoog to be there. The bridge was empty. He looked down. Directly below, a pinnacle of rock jutted up from the canyon wall, and by some hundred-to-one trick of

fate Van Hoog had struck there, and was held from the rapids below by a tangle of thorn bushes.

There still was life in him. He was making his arms and legs work. He crawled through thorns to the summit of the rock. There he would have found an eagle's perch of safety from which there was a possibility that the Negritos with rope tackle might have rescued him.

He paused, groping blindly, and Dougherty, without knowing what moved him, without realizing he was going to do so, leaned over and called, *"Haringpakker, Haringpakker, hoe maakt uwe visch het?"*

The words seemed to reach him. With a last effort Van Hoog lifted his shapeless face as though to look above, then he slid head foremost off the pinnacle, hit once on a projection or rock, and fell into the torrent. He sank, he reappeared three or four times, and finally was gone altogether in the tumbling whiteness of the rapids.

The surviving guardsmen watched dumbly from across the bridge and made no move to follow, or no move to lift their rifles. Dougherty made his legs function and climb to the landing. There, holding to one of the rope anchor posts he was surprised to see that Nana was crouched with her eyes covered, and more surprised to see that she was crying.

"Girl, girl!" he said. "It is I. There is nothing to cry about. He is gone, now. Gone forever. He is like an ugly dream. You will forget him. I will help you to forget him."

She put her arms around him, she pressed her tear-damp cheek against his neck.

"The diamonds?" she whispered. "You'll find them?"

"Of course. I'll get them. They'll be worth a fortune. I'll take you away from here. From all this. I'll dress you in ermine, in sable. We'll go to the opera, the symphony. In San Francisco. We will give our facts to the U. N., and then San Francisco. I have told you of it, girl? San Francisco—cold, and gray and clean. And the smell of it! The foggy fish-dock, pine-tree odor of home!"

Jaske, tired and with his shoes off, sitting with his back against a tree, said to Brother John, "Now there's a prime bit of foolishness. He'll go back, maybe, but he'll find it ain't so. One of 'em will be changed. Either San Francisco, or *him*. So he'll go bust bucking some back-

room lottery or faro box, and then wake up and find that his woman's gone. And he'll be back 'ere, give him a year, dying from miasma all over again. Life is like that. And so my motto is *never go back*. Because there's nothing to go back to."

THE END
of a novel by
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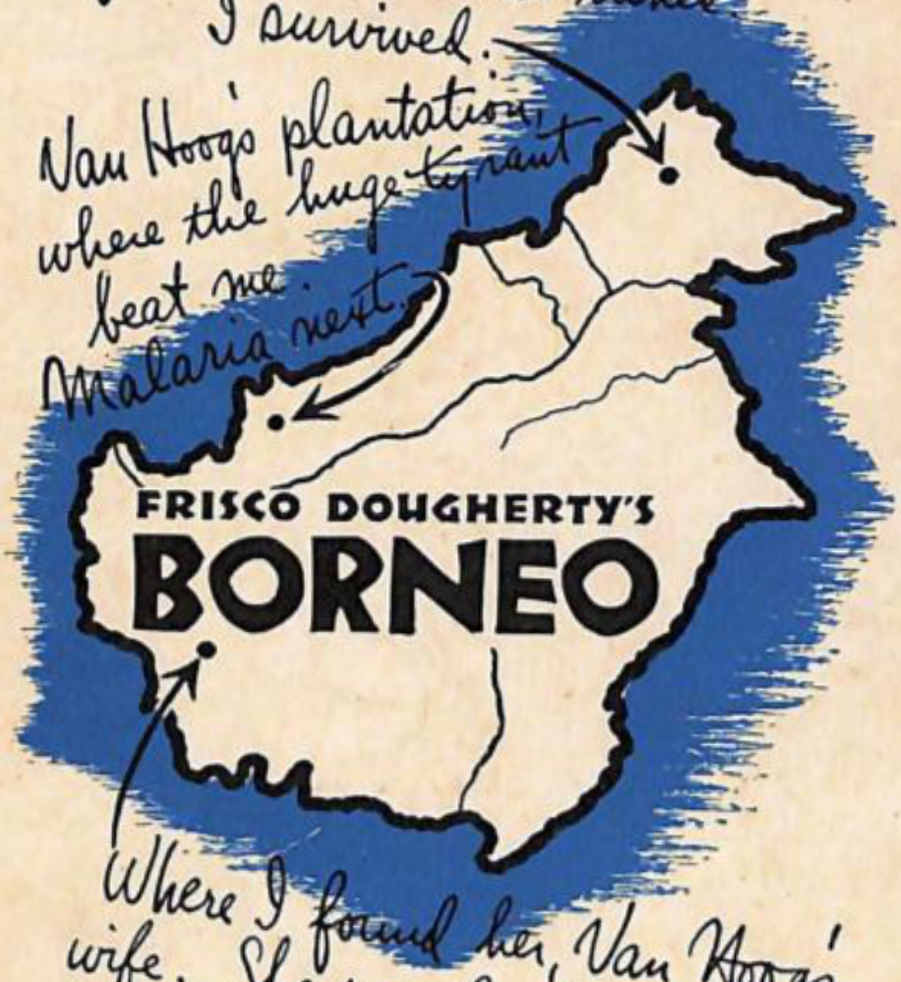
The harsh safari, Van Hoog's wife and I, to find the source of the Dutchman's riches. I survived.

Van Hoog's plantation, where the huge tyrant beat me. Malaria next.



Where I found her, Van Hoog's wife. She was lush and lovely, aye, even when she shot me.

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